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BALDERSCOURT
OR
HOLIDAY TALES
BY THE
REV. H.C. ADAMS



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Front.

The Snow Statue.—p. 106.

BALDERSCOURT;

OR,

HOLIDAY TALES.

BY THE

REV. H. C. ADAMS, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "THE WHITE BRUNSWICKERS," "SCHOOLBOY HONOUR,"

ETC. ETC.

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CHAPTER VII.	Page 1
THE PURITAN'S WARD.....	2
CHAPTER VIII.	4
THE CORNET OF DRAGOONS	4
CHAPTER IX.	4
THE RAT PRINCES	4
CHAPTER X.	4
THE SISTERS OF SEGOVIA	4

BALDERSCOURT.



CHAPTER I.

A FEW years ago, there lived in the West of England a gentleman of ancient descent and large fortune, named Wood, who had a numerous family of children of various ages, from five to seventeen. The house in which he resided was called Balderscourt, a huge rambling pile of building, the chief part of which was Elizabethan in style, though a square massive tower and gateway were said to be five hundred years older. The deep bay windows, ponderous chimneys, and multitudinous gables, gave it a very picturesque appearance from the outside. Inside it was better than picturesque, being airy, warm, and comfortable, as Elizabethan houses generally are. It had other merits also; which, in the eyes of the children at least, exceeded even external beauty or internal comfort. Its long galleries and passages afforded them a famous playground in cold

or wet weather; and there were countless closets, turret staircases, and narrow corridors in the unoccupied parts of the fabric, which the architect appeared to have constructed for the express purposes of hide and seek. During the Christmas holidays, the shouts and screams with which the east wing resounded, would have certainly driven the other inmates of the house distracted; if it had not been that a solid stone wall, with double doors, intervened between it and the inhabited portion of the house, rendering the clamour of even a dozen noisy urchins comparatively inaudible. But of an evening, particularly a winter evening, when the twilight set in early, it was a hard matter to find any amusement which would keep quiet so many restless little tongues and feet.

One day, towards the end of December, all Mrs. Wood's resources in this line appeared to have failed her. It had snowed heavily the night before, and the whole party had of necessity been imprisoned throughout the entire day. Every known description of game had been used up in the course of the morning or afternoon; and it still wanted an hour at least to the younger children's bedtime. I ought, by the bye, to have explained that Squire Wood, during the winter, dined always at five o'clock—a very unfashionable dinner hour for a Shropshire country gentleman in

those days, but one to which old custom induced him to adhere—and he liked to keep the children about him after dinner, until they went to bed. At about six o'clock, therefore, the dining-hall contained two groups; one consisting of half a dozen grown-up persons, who filled the old-fashioned chairs round the wood fire; the other of about twice that number of youngsters, gathered under the music gallery at the further end, engaged in a debate as to what should be their next employment. We must introduce them in proper order to the reader.

In the chimney corner to the right sate the Squire—the light from the ruddy fire pouring full on his bluff and masculine features. He was sixty years of age; hearty as the old English squire has traditionally been since the days of Sir Roger de Coverley, in spite of punch, poachers, and land-tax. He wore his own hair, which still looked surprisingly well for his years; the coat, waistcoat, and knee breeches of the date of his younger days; and his feet were encased in velvet slippers comfortably lined with flannel.

The chair next to him was occupied by Mrs. Marchmont, a widowed sister, who had returned with her only son in accordance with the Squire's hospitable invitation, to end her days under the same roof which had sheltered her childhood. She

was very silent, especially when one of a large party, a quality which, it need hardly be said, was highly acceptable in a company where there were so many talkers, and so few listeners.

Her neighbour was Dr. Bowles, the tutor of the three elder boys, a gaunt grave man of seven and forty, deeply learned, according to popular belief, in mediæval history and antiquities—fond, at all events, of introducing them into all subjects (his pupils' studies inclusive) on every possible pretext. This proceeding was scarcely orthodox, according to the notions of that generation; and the Squire would probably have remonstrated against it, had it not been that the Doctor, among his various researches, had devoted himself to the compilation of the "Chronicles of the Wood (or, as it was anciently pronounced the "De Worde") family," in the course of which he had exhumed from the Squire's charter-chest so many curious and interesting anecdotes, that Mr. Wood had long since given his hearty approval of the tutor's doings.

The fourth to be named was Miss Fane, a niece by marriage of Mrs. Marchmont; who had come, after her usual practice of late years, to pass Christmas at Balderscourt. She belonged to that mysterious period of female life, which is described as being between thirty and forty, but still retained something of her

early beauty—enough to amuse the Squire and his lady with the notion that both her bachelor neighbours were more than ordinarily polite to her. Mr. Hartopp, however, the rector of the parish, who sate between her and Mrs. Wood, did not seem a more promising subject for a flirtation than Dr. Bowles himself. He was stout, florid, and on the verge of becoming rubicund ; as parsons are wont to become when they approach the border land of fifty. The twinkle in his eye revealed that he was something of a humorist, and most people affirmed him to be also something of a cynic ; though the favour in which he was held by the children showed that this latter character could hardly have been anything but an assumed one. Mrs. Wood, a sweet, matronly lady, seven or eight years younger than Mr. Hartopp (who, by the way, was her brother), completed the group.

The younger party, we have already said, was fully twice as numerous ; and, we may certainly add, more than twice as noisy.

“ I vote for ‘ blind man’s buff,’ ” cried Richard, one of the elder boys.

“ No ; ‘ hunt the slipper,’ ” said Selina, who was a year older. “ We should make so much noise at ‘ blind man’s buff,’ that Uncle Hartopp would stop us.”

“ I don’t think ‘ hunt the slipper ’ would be any

quieter, and it is stupid work, except for girls," observed Willie, who having lately chipped the shell of the nursery, affected contempt for the female sex. "Let us have 'hide and seek,' I say."

"We have played at it all day," said Charlie Marchmont, who was the same age as Selina. "I don't believe there is a nook or corner in the house, in which somebody has not hidden."

Various other games were proposed by one or other of the party, but all were received with disfavour; the truth being that they were tired of play in any shape, and therefore disposed to be hypercritical. At length the hubbub was brought to a conclusion by the voice of one of the younger children exclaiming—

"Oh, Uncle Henry, tell us a story!"

"Bravo, Ethel," said Archie, the eldest boy; "I wonder we never thought of that before!"

"That will be famous!" exclaimed Selina.

"Prime!" assented Tom.

"Capital! capital!" observed the others; and in a moment Mr. Hartopp, who was dozing luxuriously in his arm-chair before the fire—as a respectable bachelor of fifty should do—was surrounded by a tumultuous group, like flies buzzing round an old horse on an August afternoon.

"Eh, what!" exclaimed the unfortunate man, as he suddenly awoke to the fact that two youngsters

had climbed on his knees ; that one or two more had mounted to the back of his chair, and were weighing on his shoulders ; while, worst of all ! one of the heaviest of the party was standing on his foot, which was tender—as *he* said—from chilblains ; but, as the Squire hinted, from incipient gout.

“ Eh, what is this ?—what do you want, you young rogues ? ” and, in answer, the whole party broke once more into full chorus, “ Oh, Uncle Henry, tell us a story ! ”

“ A story, Archie ! why, I told you the last time you asked me, that I didn’t know another. If I were the princess in the ‘ Arabian Nights,’ with the unpronounceable name, or your aunt’s brother, Giles Marchmont himself, I couldn’t satisfy your appetite for stories ; I have told you long ago, every story I ever heard in my life ! ”

“ Yes, and very nice stories they were, Uncle Henry,” observed Selina diplomatically. “ But if you don’t know one, couldn’t you make one out of your own head ? ”

“ My head can no more make stories, Miss Selina, than your favourite hen can lay golden eggs ! ”

Selina startled and coloured a little, for there was a tradition in the family, that her brothers had persuaded her when she was a little girl, that her hen would perform the feat in question, if she fed it on

golden pippins. But the diversion, though skilfully attempted, did not succeed.

"Well, then, Uncle Henry, if you don't know a story and can't make one, tell us something that happened to you when you were young," suggested Archie.

"When you were in Spain," put in the Squire, rather treacherously from the other side of the fire : for to say the truth, the uproar had become a little too much even for him ; and he was desirous of exchanging it for the monotone of his brother-in-law's delivery.

"Oh, yes, when you were in Spain ! thank you, papa," shouted the youngsters. "Now, Uncle Henry, you know you cannot refuse. Papa must be certain that you have something interesting to tell us, or he wouldn't have said that."

Uncle Henry appeared to be of the same opinion. He cast, however, a reproachful glance into the opposite corner, and resolved that, at least, he would not suffer unavenged.

"Well, children, if Tom and Richard will get off my back, and Ellen and Willie and Gerty off my knees, and Charlie Marchmont off my toes ; and you will all sit quietly down, and won't interrupt me very often, I will tell you what once happened to me. But, after that, I advise you to make papa tell you what

happened to *him* in Spain ; for that was a much stranger business than any adventure of mine."

"So we will, uncle, you may be sure," said Archie, "but please tell us your story first."

Mr. Hartopp assented, and amid the breathless silence of his youthful audience, began the story of

THE SMUGGLERS' CAVE.

It was in the year 1815 that I paid a visit to my great-uncle, who was a wine merchant, living in the south of Spain. I had left school very young ; or rather I should say, I had been removed from it, in consequence of a dangerous illness, which had so impaired my constitution, that the doctors insisted on my being sent to some southern climate for four or five months at least, before I resumed my studies. A family consultation was held to determine the place to which I was to be consigned. Few persons visited any other countries but France and Italy in those days ; but, as Mr. St. George Hartopp had written home to say that he was anxious to see something of his great-nephew, it was agreed that I should pass the spring and summer with him. Charlie Goring and I set sail from the Thames in a Spanish trading vessel ; and after a terrible tossing in the Bay of Biscay, arrived at Cadiz, where my uncle resided. I dare-

say you boys and girls know something about Cadiz?"

"On the south-west coast of Andalusia; lat. $36^{\circ} 31'$, long. $6^{\circ} 19'$," exclaimed Selina.

"Founded by the Phœnicians; afterwards a Roman colony," remarked Archie, with a glance at his tutor who nodded approval.

"Besieged by Marshal Victor, but he couldn't take it," shouted Tom.

"Principal trading city of Spain," resumed Selina; "population in 1840——"

"There, that will do," exclaimed Uncle Hartopp, astounded at the outbreak of learning which he had called forth. "You know more about it, apparently, than I do, or ever did know, or, I dare say, ever shall know. I remember it, however, well enough. It was a large and handsome city, even thirty years ago, and unlike any other which I have ever seen. The houses are nearly all built in the Moorish fashion—round courts, that is to say, opening into one another, and planted with orange and citron trees. There was a fountain also in the centre; and we used to lounge all day long, lying on carpets under the trees, and listening lazily to the trickling of the water."

"Oh, uncle," said Selina, with a shiver, as she glanced at the snow on the window-sill outside, "I shouldn't have liked that at all."

"No, indeed," cried Tom, stirring the large fire into a blaze; "the very idea makes one's blood run cold."

"Ah, you are right," continued Mr. Hartopp. "It wouldn't be quite the thing this weather, would it? Indeed, I don't think it would suit our English climate very well, at any time of the year. But there is very little resemblance between Andalusia and Shropshire, I can assure you. And if you had been in our place, you would have delighted in it as much as Charlie Goring and I did."

"Charlie Goring, uncle?" interrupted Richard; "I forgot to ask you just now who he was."

"Who was he?" returned his uncle with a sigh. "Ah! I forgot, I hadn't told you. He was an old school-fellow, a lad of my own age, who had gone to sea as a midshipman a few years before. His ship had just been paid off, and he had obtained leave to pass some time with his friends before rejoining. My uncle had allowed me to invite him as a companion during my Spanish visit.

Well, as I said, we had a very pleasant time of it; lounging through the delicious summer days under the orange-trees, and going out every evening to balls and masquerades and concerts, and all kinds of entertainments, of which there was no lack in the city of Cadiz. We made several agreeable acquaintances, and

amongst others that of Captain de Castro, the officer in command of a detachment of troops stationed in the neighbourhood. I ought to have told you that, at that time, almost the whole trade of Spain was in the hands of smugglers. The imposts exacted by the Government were so enormous, that it would have almost ruined the tradespeople to pay them. Cadiz, it was said, was the very centre of the smuggling operations at that date. Almost every week there were stories told us of desperate encounters between the soldiers and contrabandistas, in which lives were lost on both sides.

It was getting towards the hot season of the year, when Mr. Hartopp one day told us that he purposed setting out in the course of a few days for his country seat, which was situated high up in the mountains, near the town of Medina Sidonia. It had always been his practice, we found, to repair thither during the hot season of the year; and we were greatly pleased at the notion of accompanying him. It added to our pleasure to discover that he had extended his invitation to Jack Middleton, a young ensign whose regiment was stationed at Gibraltar, and who was paying a visit to a friend in Cadiz. Jack was to join us in the course of a few weeks; and as he was an agreeable companion, not more than a couple of years older than ourselves, everything seemed to promise us

a pleasant visit to the château. The only drawback to our satisfaction was the warning which my grand-uncle thought it necessary to give us, to be careful not to stray to any distance without the escort of one of his servants; as the country was full of desperate characters, who regarded a man's life as of less value than a bale of tobacco. Goring and I, who were a pair of silly madcaps, were rather pleased than otherwise at this idea—the more so because we found that Captain de Castro was on the point of shifting his quarters shortly to Medina Sidonia; which it appeared the smugglers had now made their chief basis of operations. So one fine day—literally a fine day, I can assure you, such as we don't see in this country twice in the course of a twelvemonth——

"Come, none of that, Hartopp," interposed the Squire, who, like most country gentlemen, was Tory to the backbone, and could not endure to hear, for a moment, the climate of England held cheap in comparison with that of other countries. "I have been in Spain too, recollect; and have not forgotten the glare, the dust, and the mosquitoes, which were the chief characteristics of the four months I spent there. For my part, I would rather have one month of English summer."

"So would I," growled Uncle Hartopp, "if I could only get it. But leave me alone, Squire,

game-bags, and hurried in the direction of the sound. For some time they could not discover whence it proceeded; but at length the cries guided them into a path, which neither of them before had perceived, though they had frequently passed that way. It was in truth so ingeniously masked by shrubs and trailers, that a man might have lived for years in that neighbourhood, and yet never have suspected its existence. Charlie and Middleton followed the track for two hundred yards, when they came in sight of a man stretched at full length on the ground, while a loaded mule stood patiently by, a few yards in advance. They saw at a glance what had been the cause of the accident. The path at that point ran immediately under a projecting crag, a large portion of which had fallen on the muleteer as he passed beneath. They raised the man, who was now insensible from pain; but they were quite at their wits' end what to do with him. The château was, so far as they knew, the nearest house. But it would take at least an hour to go thither, and to return—by which time it would be too late to render any assistance. At last Charlie suggested laying him on the mule, and carrying him there; and in despair of any better expedient, they agreed to try it. Accordingly they threw off all the bags of tobacco, with which the animal was loaded, except one; and then with much difficulty they suc-

ceeded in placing the wounded man upon it. But a fresh difficulty now presented itself. The mule was obstinate, and refused to turn ; and the path was so narrow, that they dared not use force. They were obliged to lead her straight forward, until they could find some spot broad enough for their purpose. But before they had gone twenty steps, they found themselves at the entrance of a low cavern ; though here again trailing shrubs so completely concealed it, that if it had not been for the mule passing on straight through them, they would never have discovered it. After a few steps the vaulted passage expanded into a lofty grotto ; which appeared to be partly natural, partly excavated by man's labour. It was lighted by several fissures in the rock ; through one of which they could see the whole of the level country, many hundred feet beneath, stretching out to the sea, with the town of Medina Sidonia in the foreground. The cave itself was very spacious, and opened, they could see, into another cave beyond it. Both were piled from floor to roof with barrels and bales of every shape and size ; while in the foreground a rude table, and a number of seats scattered about, showed that the grotto was also used as a place of residence. They could have had no doubt that they had penetrated into one of the mountain fastnesses of the smugglers, even if the number of carbines and cutlasses, which

lay scattered on the floor and table, had not afforded still surer evidence that the spot was the haunt of desperadoes. The full peril of their situation rushed upon them ; but humanity forbade them to desert the poor wretch, who appeared to be in the last extremity. They lifted him from the mule, which immediately walked away into a side cavern, where doubtless was its stable ; while Goring and Middleton looked about for some one to render assistance. The place, however, seemed to be wholly deserted.

"I will look into the further cave," said Charlie to his companion. "Whoever has been left in charge will probably be there. We can't leave the poor fellow ; and surely the smugglers won't hurt us, when they know what brought us here."

He disappeared through the rude stone archway, while Middleton, bending over the sufferer, undid the handkerchief which was wound round his throat, and raised his head so as to enable him to breathe more freely. While thus engaged, he felt himself suddenly seized from behind ; and, looking round, found that he was in the grasp of a tall, powerful man, armed with cutlass and pistols, and wearing the picturesque mountain dress which Jack had so often admired. He was inclined for a moment to shake off with equal violence the hold so unceremoniously laid upon him ; but a single glance round the cave made him change

his resolve. His assailant was accompanied by eight or ten stout fellows, all armed and attired like himself; and it was evident that they regarded Middleton with doubt and suspicion. In answer to their hurried inquiries as to who he was, and what had brought him thither, he told his story, as well as his imperfect knowledge of Spanish would allow. But at its conclusion his captor shook his head with an ominous frown.

"It is a strange tale," he said. "Perez was left in charge of the cave, and would scarcely have left it, had he not seen you coming. Unless, when he recovers from his swoon, he confirms your story——"

"He will never do that," said another of the party, who had been bending over the recumbent figure. "He is as dead as poor Juan, his brother, who was shot last year by the soldiers. He is stone dead, I tell you. And who knows that this stranger has not murdered him?"

"Besides that, it does not signify a real whether his story is true or not," broke in another of his party. "Is it not one of our strictest laws that whoever discovers any of our hiding-places shall be shot forthwith, unless he consents to join us? We could not admit this foreign fellow, even if he wished it; and therefore——"

He concluded his speech with a very significant handling of his carbine ; the rattle of which made poor Middleton's blood run cold.

"And moreover," added another, "the man is a spy. I am convinced of it. I saw him only two days ago in De Castro's company."

"Are you sure of that, Pedro?" inquired the first speaker, whose name, it appeared, was Carlos.

"Quite sure," returned the other.

"Pedro is right," said the man with a carbine. "I have seen him at the soldiers' quarters more than once."

"Ha!" said Carlos, "if he is a spy, he deserves no mercy."

And drawing a pistol from his belt, he pointed it at Middleton's head.

"Oh, uncle! oh, uncle!" broke in one or two of the younger children, piteously, "he didn't shoot him, did he?"

"Be quiet," interposed Archie, breathlessly. "Well, uncle—"

As Carlos was on the point of pulling the trigger, another of the party caught his hand.

"Don't fire," he said. "The soldiers have shifted their quarters this morning to Lopez's farm-house, yonder. You know what an echo there is among these mountains. They will hear the shot, and that

will set them on examining these rocks more closely than they've hitherto done."

"Lopez's farm-house, Antonio?" exclaimed Carlos. "Do you mean the white house there?" And he pointed as he spoke to a white spot among the trees. "Why, that is not half a mile off!"

"I know that," replied the other. "That is just why you must not fire. As for this matter, I will soon settle it without noise."

And, catching up a short piece of cord from the ground, he twisted it dexterously round Middleton's neck, who was too much taken by surprise to offer resistance. In another minute he would have been garrotted, as they call it out there—i. e., strangled—if Carlos now had not interposed in his turn. He was lieutenant in the band, I ought to have told you, and probably did not like his authority to be interfered with.

"We had better wait for Captain Bartolo's return," he said. "He will be here in two hours at furthest."

"And in the meantime who is to see that he does not escape?" grumbled Antonio. "All of us have our hands full of work, and have no leisure to be watching him."

"I will see to that," said Carlos, "shortly. Pedro, bring me the handcuffs and belt. There," he continued, as he secured Middleton's wrists with the

former articles, and locked the latter, to which a chain was attached, round his waist, "he will hardly escape, I think, before the captain returns. Take him into the further cave, Pedro."

"But, Uncle Henry," once more interposed one of the younger ones, "what has become of Mr. Goring? Why didn't he rush out and save his friend? I don't like that Mr. Goring."

"You get out," said Tom, superciliously. "What! a man, alone and unarmed too, attack a lot of fellows with swords and pistols? He would have been a flat to do that, I think. No. He'll lie by, won't he, Uncle Henry, until they are all asleep, and then he'll creep out, and take a dagger——"

"No, he won't," said little Ethel; "he'll take a kettle full of boiling oil, like Morgiana in 'Ali Baba,' and——"

"A kettle of boiling oil!" exclaimed Tom, again. "Where's he to get the oil from, or the kettle, or the fire to boil it at? Besides, the men are not shut up in jars as the Forty Thieves were. No, he'll take the dagger, and he'll stab——"

"Oh, no! Tom," broke in Ellen. "He'll make his escape, and bring the soldiers. Only think, to have to kill all those men, and asleep too!"

"Serve 'em right," rejoined Tom, doggedly. "No, I tell you—he'll take the dagger——"

"Just be quiet, Tom, will you?" exclaimed Charlie impatiently, interrupting for the third time the details of Tom's sanguinary suggestions. "*You* needn't talk. If you had been there, you would have lain among the barrels in such an awful fright, that you would not have dared to move either hand or foot, I expect. Go on, Mr. Hartopp, please."

Tom scowled savagely at the speaker, and would have retorted; but a general exclamation of impatience silenced him, and the narrator resumed:—

You all want to know where Mr. Goring was, do you? Well, I'll tell you. He was hidden—where Charlie says, Tom would have hidden—among the barrels in the inner cave. He was coming back after a vain search for help, and saw his friend in the grasp of the smugglers. As Tom has suggested, he wasn't so foolish as to attack a lot of desperate fellows, all armed to the teeth, so he crept back into the further cave, and hid himself. By-and-by, Pedro came in, dragging poor Middleton after him. He secured the chain by a padlock to a strong staple, to which, I dare say, many unlucky prisoners had been fastened; and then returned to join his comrades. A minute or two afterwards Goring crept out of his hiding-place to hold counsel with his friend.

Middleton soon told him all that had passed. There was no fear of their being overheard, for the

two caves were separated by a long passage, quite choked with goods, and the smugglers were too busy to pay any heed to their captive.

"It is all over with me, Charlie," said Middleton. "Captain Bartolo will be here in an hour and a half, or two hours at furthest, and then they are quite certain to murder me. I've heard my friends in Cadiz speak of him more than once, and he's reputed to be the most blood-thirsty cut-throat in Spain. But you may contrive to escape them, if you are careful. You have only to wait until it is dark, and you may get out unobserved."

"And leave you to be butchered, Jack, eh?" interrupted Goring. "No, that will not do any way. I would a great deal sooner be shot myself. But I have thought of a plan by which I may escape, and reach De Castro's quarters in time to save you. But we must not lose a minute."

"Escape! what, through the midst of those fellows? You must be crazy, Goring. Why—"

"Hush! I don't mean anything of the kind. You see that coil of rope?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"You must help to lower me by it down the face of the precipice."

"Why, Charlie," exclaimed Middleton, "you really must be mad! I had a glimpse of the fall when we

first came in, and it must be two hundred feet at the least."

"More, I expect," replied Goring, coolly.

"And that rope cannot be half the length," pursued Middleton, measuring with his eye.

"About half the length," said the other. "I have made a rough calculation of the number of coils, and the length of each. I judge it to be rather more than thirty yards long."

"And how in the world, then, can you expect it to lower you down a precipice of more than twice its length?"

"Listen, Jack," said Goring. "I can't see the face of the precipice at all clearly, as the rock at this height bulges out a little. But the chances are that there are crevices in it large enough to afford me standing room, or trees growing out here and there from it. At all events, I must take my chance at finding something of the kind. If so, I shall take up my station on the lowest standing point which I can reach. You must then let your end of the rope fall, and I shall tie it again to anything I can find sufficiently strong to hold it. If this fails to reach the bottom, I must try to scramble down the rest of the way as well as I can. When we were in the West Indies, I have climbed up and down places, which I daresay were nearly as bad."

"My dear Charlie, you must not attempt this desperate adventure on my account. It is all but suicide."

"I must, Jack. I would rather die at once than see you murdered ; and it is one or the other. Now tell me—for we must not lose a moment. Which is Lopez's farmhouse ?"

Middleton pointed it out ; and perceiving that his friend was determined to risk the attempt, reluctantly grasped the end of the rope which he offered him.

"But stay a moment, Goring," he exclaimed. "How am I to know when to let go the end which I hold ? My chain will not let me come near enough to the edge to watch your descent, even if my head could stand it ; and a shout would alarm the smugglers."

"I have thought of that. Here is your watch." He took it out of Middleton's pocket as he spoke. "In a quarter of an hour from the present moment, let the rope drop."

The two friends grasped hands without another word. Middleton attached his end of the rope firmly to the iron girdle round his waist : Goring threw the other over the scarp of the rock, and seizing the upper part in his hands vanished from sight. For a few moments the former could hear the slight scraping sound, as the strands passed through his friend's hands and feet ; but this soon ceased. He listened with an intensity which

only those who have been placed in such a situation can understand—expecting every moment to hear the death shriek of the daring voyager, or the crash of his body falling into the abyss. The minutes crept on so slowly, that again and again he was persuaded that his watch had stopped ; and it was the sound of its ticking alone that satisfied him to the contrary. At length, after what seemed an age of suspense, the minute hand reached the point indicated by his friend.

Middleton disengaged the rope from his girdle, and flung it over the rock. That was the thing that tried his nerves most of all ; and when a minute afterwards he heard, or fancied he could hear, a heavy plunge a long way below, he swooned from over-excitement of mind and body.

“And what did become of Mr. Goring ?” burst from a dozen eager little voices at once, as Mr. Har-topp paused in his narrative.

“Patience, youngsters,” said the latter ; “I must now tell you my share in the matter.”

I went down, according to agreement, to De Castro's quarters at seven o'clock. I was a little late, and found my host somewhat vexed that none of his three English guests had arrived. After a quarter of an hour or so, we agreed that Goring and Middleton must altogether have forgotten the appointment, or else must have been so absorbed by their sport that they could not

bear to break it off. Accordingly we sat down to dinner, a party of six or seven officers and a civilian or two. But we had hardly begun our repast, when the door was flung open, and Goring staggered in. He was a strange figure to look at. His clothes were torn almost to ribbons, and were soaking wet. His face, deathly pale, was covered with bruises and wounds, and one arm hung helplessly at his side. All present sprang from their chairs, and listened in breathless suspense to the story which he poured forth. Exhausted and almost fainting as he was, he yet contrived to relate, in as few words as possible, the adventure of the afternoon, concluding with an earnest entreaty to De Castro not to lose a single instant in following him to the smugglers' haunt.

The Spaniard was not the man to make unnecessary delay. In ten minutes a band of picked men, accompanied by the officers who had been De Castro's guests, and headed by their host himself, were on their way to the mountains. Charlie Goring—who would not allow the surgeon to examine his hurts, and refused all refreshment, except a large cup of wine—led the way, leaning on De Castro's arm.

"Did you go with the party, Uncle Henry?" asked Selina.

"I did, Miss Inquisitive; and I shall not forget the scene I witnessed as long as I live."

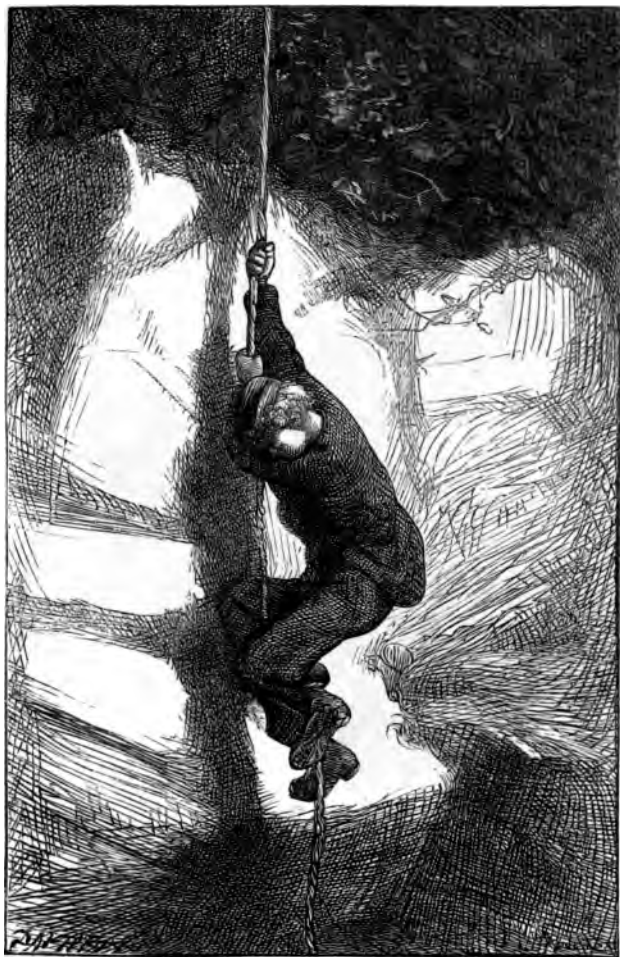
Goring acted as guide, and led us directly to the entrance of the secret path. He must have been directed, I have always felt, by some preternatural instinct; for he never paused a moment, though he had never seen the spot but once in his life, and that very hastily. The soldiers were ordered to crawl as close to the ground as possible, keeping out of sight among the shrubs, until they were close to the cave; and then to make a sudden rush, as a desperate defence was anticipated. But to our great surprise there was not even a sentinel at the entrance, and the outer cave was entirely empty. Goring, notwithstanding his wounds and exhaustion, hurried through the passage to the inner cave, supported by De Castro. They were not a moment too soon; the rope was once more round Middleton's neck, and in another minute it would have been all over with him, if a bullet from De Castro's pistol had not stretched his executioner on the ground. The smugglers made little resistance. They were caught in a trap without their arms, and their assailants were three to one. They were handcuffed and marched off to prison; whence they were sent a few days afterwards to the galleys—all of them, that is to say, excepting Captain Bartolo, to whose journeys De Castro's bullet had put a stop for ever.

"Uncle," asked Tom, as Mr. Hartopp desisted, "Did

Mr. Goring tell you how he contrived to get down the precipice?"

Yes, he did. We questioned him closely upon the subject, for the Spaniards would hardly believe the fact.

It appeared that he lowered himself by the rope down the rock, which was, he found, as perpendicular as a wall, for some eighty or ninety feet. Then he came on a sloping ledge, which afforded him a temporary resting-place; but there was neither stick nor stone to which he could re-fasten the rope. A long way down—perhaps eighty feet—he could see another ledge like the one on which he was resting, and below that again a pool of water. The rock between the two ledges sloped slightly outward, with broken and jagged projections. It was barely possible for a goat or a midshipman to scramble down, holding by these. Firm as his nerves were, it made even him shudder to attempt it. He knew, however, that it was the only chance for himself and his friend; and without allowing himself time to think, began the descent. He had got down more than three-quarters of the distance, when the rope, released by Middleton above, struck him in its fall with sufficient force to dislodge the slight hold which was all he could retain on the edges of the rock; and he fell sixteen feet, on to the ledge beneath him. The fall broke his arm; and,



He lowered himself by the rope down the rock.—p. 30.

utterly powerless, he rolled over the ledge into the pool below. The plunge into cold water revived him so far as to enable him to struggle ashore; but he fainted from exhaustion immediately on reaching it.

Half an hour afterwards he was found by a peasant passing that way, and was no sooner restored to consciousness, than he hurried to the farmhouse as you have heard. We visited the spot—all three of us—a few days afterwards, and I don't know which of the three was most affected by the sight of it. I remember we all knelt down, as if by one impulse, and thanked God for His wonderful mercy and protection. I think it did all the party a great deal of good. I am sure it did me.

When Uncle Hartopp had concluded his narrative, no one spoke for a minute or two. Then Selina said, "I should like to know what became of Mr. Goring and Mr. Middleton afterwards."

"I know," said Archie, "about Mr. Goring, at all events. He must be the Captain Goring, who came to see papa two years ago."

"You are right," said his uncle. "He was with Codrington at Navarino, and was made a post-captain after the capture of Acre by Napier and Stopford."

"And Mr. Middleton, uncle?"

"Poor fellow!" sighed Uncle Henry, "he was killed at Sobraon—one of Sir H. Gough's most dis-

tinguished officers! Well, both my friends have done their duty in life, and that is the great thing after all—what they were spared for, no doubt. I wish I may be found to have done mine as well!”

Mr. Hartopp said this in a graver tone than usual, and again for a minute or two there was silence. But no one ever knew the silence last longer than a minute or two.

“Uncle Henry,” began a little voice; “do tell us——”

“I can’t tell you anything more, Ethel,” said her uncle, with a sigh of relief, “for here comes nurse and her myrmidons to fetch you away.”

CHAPTER II.

A TEMPORARY lull ensued after the departure of the "Underwood," as the seven younger children were usually styled. There was an interval, it should be explained, of three years between Richard and Tom, who were twins, and William, who came next in order ; which circumstance made a division of the family into two batches, at once natural and convenient. Uncle Hartopp, who, as we have seen, was fond of his joke, used sometimes to describe these as "Top and Lop," sometimes as "Branches and Underwood ;" and innumerable were the family jests to which these celebrated witticisms had given rise. The removal of the "Underwood" on the present occasion was welcomed (if the truth must be told) by more than one of the grown-up occupants of the Hall, under the impression that there would now be a cessation of the tumult which had reigned without let or hindrance for the last hour and a-half. But they did injustice to the powers of the "Branches" and their trusty ally, Charles Marchmont, in this

respect, if they thought so. Mr. Wood was speedily beset by five eager assailants ; who claimed, partly as a favour, partly as a right, the performance of the promise which Uncle Henry, they averred, had made in his name.

"Now, papa, you must tell us the story of what happened to you in Spain."

"Oh, yes, papa ; Uncle Henry said it was quite as interesting as what he has told us."

"Perhaps Uncle Henry was mistaken about that," suggested Mr. Wood ; "or, indeed, in saying that anything interesting happened to me in Spain."

"Oh, no, papa, he was not mistaken ; were you, Uncle Henry ?"

Mr. Hartopp, who was relapsing into a comfortable nap, grunted a negative.

"There, papa, you hear what uncle says," rejoined Charlie.

"Well," said Mr. Wood, "if you must have a story, you must, but I think I know what you will like better. A great many years ago, my poor friend Penrose turned the tale which Uncle Hartopp speaks of, and which I certainly *heard* in Spain, into a little play ; and if you all like it, you can act it on Twelfth-night. I have it somewhere in my bureau."

There was a general burst of applause.

"Oh, that will be glorious, won't it?" burst out Richard.

"I should think it would, just!" exclaimed Tom.

"We'll have the old hall for a theatre," suggested Archie, "and Tom Davis shall make us the scenes, and I'll paint them——"

"And Mrs. Dennis has lots of green baize for a curtain——"

"And the benches from the schoolroom will make capital seats——"

"And there are plenty of dresses in the old wardrobe. At least, we can make plenty of dresses up from the things there——"

"And——"

"Hush, hush, children," interposed Mrs. Wood, who had at last contrived to slip in a word edgewise. "I will send for Davis, and put Dennis's stores at your service—but, on one condition only; and that is, that you make no more noise now. If you want a story, I have no doubt Dr. Bowles, if you ask him, will read you the history of 'Reginald de Worde,' which he showed me the other day. But we must have no more noise, for my head aches with it, as it is."

The youngsters for a moment seemed somewhat discomfited by this suggestion, for they were half afraid of being ensnared into what boys regard with especial

dislike, viz., a lesson out of school hours. It was therefore with rather an embarrassed air, that Archie made the request proposed by his mother ; and when Dr. Bowles complying with, what they thought, a most suspicious alacrity, got up to fetch his MSS., a very blank look was exchanged among them. However, there was no help for it, so they once more seated themselves to listen. Mr. Hartopp, who was continually waging a half jocose, half serious warfare with the tutor—for their views of mediæval history were entirely opposed to each other—woke up out of his drowsiness, like a bird of prey who scents the coming battle. Dr. Bowles, on his return, was a little disturbed to find his enemy, whom he had believed to be *hors de combat*, so evidently on the alert. But it was too late to recede now ; so opening his MSS., he began the tale of—

THE MARCHER'S HEIR.

It was late in the reign of King Henry II., about five and twenty years before the close of the twelfth century, when the incidents occurred which I am about to relate to you. The family of the De Wordes, from whom (as I have no doubt you all know) your family is descended, attained in that reign the climax of their fortunes. Baldwyn de Worde had accom-

panied the Norman Conqueror in his invasion of England, and received a grant of land in the south-west of Shropshire; which, like his brothers in arms, he had to wrench by force from the grasp of the sturdy Saxon who held it. De Worde pulled down the long low range of buildings, in which Cenlac's ancestors had dwelt, erecting in their place a Norman keep and barbican.

"Are there any remains of them left, Dr. Bowles?" inquired Selina.

"Yes, Miss Selina," returned the tutor; "the greater part of them is left. The very rooms which you and your brothers and sisters have been playing 'hide and seek' in to-day, formed part of that same Norman keep."

"What, the corkscrews and all?" inquired Tom, wonderingly.

"The corkscrews and all," replied Dr. Bowles; "that is, if by the corkscrews you mean the turret stairs, which lead from one floor to another, as I suppose is the case. By the bye, did you ever take particular notice of the highest room in the eastern tower of the keep?"

"Do you mean the room with that curious little chamber made in the thickness of the wall, and lighted by a narrow slit?" inquired Archie. "We know that room very well."

I do, was the answer. I am glad you recollect it, as it will be of some importance in the story I am going to tell you. Well, as I said, Baldwyn de Worde built a keep and barbican, which he took care to render sufficiently strong to resist the probable incursions of his Welsh neighbours. Without that precaution, Castle Baldwyn, as the fortress was called, would have been but a perilous place of residence. The Welsh were in the habit, not only of declaring war on the most trifling provocation, but of making the first announcement of hostilities by attacking their neighbours' strongholds with all the soldiers they could muster, and massacring, without ceremony, all who fell into their hands—

“ Good old times ! ” muttered Mr. Hartopp, *sotto voce*, though still loud enough to be heard. Dr. Bowles took no notice, but proceeded, though with a heightened colour.

But the castle was so strong, and the watch kept so careful, that the Welshmen, after one or two disastrous failures, were obliged to confine themselves to an occasional raid on the crops and cattle of the Norman; which was forthwith requited in kind by the sufferers—

“ Happy times ! ” again interpolated the cynic.

But the De Wordes had other enemies besides their wild neighbours. The family of the De Brentons, whose domains adjoined theirs, had been at enmity

for three generations with the owners of Castle Baldwyn—

“To be sure they had,” broke in Mr. Hartopp, unable to restrain himself any longer; “you needn’t tell us that, Bowles. No family of respectability in those days was without one or two hereditary feuds, which descended from father to son along with the iron helmets and silver drinking-cups—and by reason of which about twenty-five per cent. in every generation were cut off, before they came to the age of thirty!”

“Mr. Hartopp,” said Dr. Bowles, “these interruptions are most unfair. If you are prepared to enter into a fair discussion—”

“No, no,” interposed the Squire, hastily, “pray don’t, Hartopp, I must call you to order. If you interrupt again, we’ll inflict some penalty adequate to the offence. Make you tell another story, perhaps,” he added, with a malicious twinkle of his eye. “I think that will frighten him into silence. Go on, Bowles.”

The tutor bowed, and resumed:—

The De Wordes, as I said before, had other enemies besides the Welsh. The family of the De Brentons had been at enmity for three generations with the owners of Castle Baldwyn. At the accession of Stephen they had taken opposite sides, and the De Wordes, who had espoused the cause of Matilda, had some difficulty in holding their own against their rivals.

But when Henry succeeded to the throne, the fortunes of the two houses were reversed. A pitched battle was fought between them, in which the De Brentons were not only defeated, but nearly exterminated. The De Brenton, who next succeeded to the ancestral estate, found his fortune so reduced, that he never attempted any armed retaliation on the slayers of his father and kinsmen. Perhaps this may have arisen as much from disinclination as from weakness; for the new owner of Brenton Castle had no fancy for warfare, but passed his days in secret and mysterious studies, which gained him the reputation of a wizard among his neighbours.

(Dr. Bowles glanced nervously at Uncle Hartopp as he read this sentence, and reddened at the look he received in return. But the parson said nothing, and the reader proceeded, though evidently ill at ease.)

A discovery, which had been made a few months before the commencement of my story, seemed to justify these suspicions. Raoul de Worde, the head of the family, was a man between fifty and sixty years of age, who had lost his only son in the memorable encounter with the De Brentons before mentioned. His heir therefore was his grandson Reginald; a boy about twelve years of age—as noble and gallant a lad, say the chroniclers of those days, as ever drew a bow

or mounted a steed. To the great grief of his friends he had been attacked by a wasting sickness, which the leeches, as the physicians of those days were called, could neither cure nor understand. Father Eustace, who had had the care of him almost from his cradle, openly declared his belief that he had been bewitched, and celebrated masses innumerable in the chapel of the convent, for the reversal of the evil spells by which he had been stricken down.

This opinion, taken in connection with the sinister rumours current in the neighbourhood respecting Hugo de Brenton, so worked on the mind of old Raoul de Worde, that he set out one night with thirty of his most trusty men-at-arms on a secret expedition to his enemy's castle ; of which he gained possession without resistance. The result of the search immediately set on foot was most startling. In a secret chamber, opening from the sleeping apartment of the baron, were found crucibles, chafing dishes, and other reputed implements of sorcery ; and, more shocking than all, in one of the cellars or dungeons a waxen image, declared to be the exact image of young Reginald de Worde, fastened upright against the wall by a steel spike driven through it. The sight of this unanswerable evidence of witchcraft, excited such horror and fury among the followers of the De Worde, that they forthwith proceeded, without even the formality of a

trial, to execute judgment on Baron Hugo ; who, within an hour of the discovery, was burnt alive in the court-yard of his own castle.

“ But Dr. Bowles,” interrupted Archie, “ you don’t mean to say, do you, that there are such things as wizards, who could kill people by making wax figures of them, and piercing them through with a bodkin, as they used to fancy many hundred years ago ? ”

I don’t believe about the wax images, returned the tutor—glad to see that Mr. Hartopp had now relapsed into a comfortable nap again—that is, I don’t believe that any one could be made ill by them. Poor Baron Hugo at all events suffered innocently, for he declared, with his dying breath, that what they had found were simply the implements which he employed in the study of alchemy ; while as for the wax image, he knew nothing about it, and it must have been a device of his enemies to ruin him. But many people certainly did believe that they could destroy people’s lives by making these figures ; and it would be just as wicked to make them under such circumstances as if they really had that effect. Indeed it was afterwards discovered that the image in question had been made by Aymeric, Hugo’s younger brother, who had fled to the court of the King of Powysland, as soon as he perceived the approach of Baron Raoul’s troops. As to the possibility of witchcraft, that is of dealing with

evil spirits, we had better wait till you are somewhat older before we discuss that.

Well, as I said, summary justice was executed on the supposed sorcerer, and just as the fire was at its highest, the waxen image was brought out into the court-yard by Giles Guibert, the Baron's squire; who was on the point of throwing it into the flames, when his arm was arrested by Father Eustace.

"How, Father," said Guibert, in surprise, "shall we not destroy the works of Satan along with his servant? And who knoweth moreover, whether this accursed figure, if it be not consumed with its maker, may not yet be the cause of mischief to our young lord?"

"Fear not that," returned Father Eustace, "holy Church hath power to exorcise the evil spirit which dwelleth in it; and it is meet that this sure witness of the justice of De Brenton's sentence should be preserved for the satisfaction of King Henry, or whomsoever he may depute to make inquiries into this night's work."

So saying, he carefully wrapped the image in a roll of cloth, and conveying it to Castle Baldwyn, deposited it in a secret recess in the chamber which he occupied.

"What!" exclaimed Tom, "do you mean the recess in that room up at the top of the large tower, which you were telling us of just now?"

That very room, replied Dr. Bowles. The recess was then so cunningly concealed by panelling and tapestry, that the most observant eye would not have discovered it. Father Eustace was in the habit of keeping there a few valuable articles which belonged to him, a rare MS. or two, some relics of reputed sanctity, one or two flasks of rich cordial wine, and the like. There he placed the image, in order that it might be safe from the eyes of the curious, until some day when its evidence perhaps might be needed.

The record of the execution of the sorcerer was duly forwarded to the court of King Henry ; who was pleased to approve of the proceedings without sending (as Father Eustace had anticipated) any of his law-officers to make inquisition respecting it. Nay, he even carried his approval so far, as to bestow all the lands of the De Brentons, forfeited by the crime for which their late owner had died, on Baron Raoul. The truth was, that Henry was beginning to find his authority grievously impaired by the defection of many of his barons to the standard of his rebellious sons. In particular, the Earl of Chester had espoused their cause, and he was the most powerful baron in the western counties. Henry, therefore, was anxious to strengthen his interest in that neighbourhood. Moreover, it was currently reported that Aymeric, Hugo's younger brother, was plotting in conjunction with the

disaffected Normans, and the turbulent Welsh; and he was known far and wide as a bitter and unscrupulous enemy, to baffle or defeat whom would be no easy matter.

Months, however, passed away, and nothing was heard of Aymeric or his allies. Young Reginald, whose recovery had been slow, was now restored almost to his former health; and Father Eustace, who had made a vow of dedicating a silver image at a neighbouring shrine in the event of his recovery, now proceeded to its performance. He set out, accompanied by Reginald, who had earnestly petitioned to be allowed to take his part in the pilgrimage, and by a slight escort of Norman soldiers, intended rather as servitors than as guards; for in those days few ventured to interfere with pilgrims. It proved otherwise, however, on the present occasion.

As they passed through a narrow defile in the mountains, they were suddenly set upon by a band of robbers, as it seemed, whose long knives, half-naked limbs, and uncouth language, at once declared them to be Welshmen. The Norman soldiers, few in number and unprepared for the attack, were instantly overthrown, and almost hacked to pieces by their savage enemies. Father Eustace and his pupil were not subjected to any violence, but were even treated with a kind of rough respect. They were conveyed to a rude

building at a little distance, in which were assembled several men, dressed like those who had seized them, only better armed, and having an air of command. One tall warrior, who wore round his forehead a golden circlet, and who occupied the principal seat, commanded them to approach.

"Who are ye that travel without permission through the domains of Gryffyth of Powysland," he said, in tolerable Norman, "and resist with violence those who are sent to demand your purpose?"

"I am a friar of the order of Augustin," replied the monk, boldly, "now on my way to the shrine of the blessed Winifred, in fulfilment of a vow made to that saint. Rather, how is it, Sir King, that you presume with lawless violence to assail peaceful travellers; above all, to lay sacrilegious hands on the servants of the Church when engaged in her service?"

"And I," added the boy, observing that the Welshman's eye rested also on him, as though expecting an answer, "I am Reginald de Worde, grandson of the Lord of Baldwyn Castle: and I bid you beware how you offer us insult or wrong, lest the Baron de Worde avenge it tenfold."

"Ha! can that be so?" exclaimed the Welsh chief, affecting to make inquiries of his followers. "Nay, then, an error has been committed, for which we owe you some reparation. Reverend father, you are free to

continue your journey, which we regret has been interrupted. A guard of soldiers shall accompany you as far as the shrine of St. Winifred, to prevent the recurrence of a like mischance. As for you, young sir," continued the speaker, addressing Reginald, "we will ourselves at once set forth and accompany you back to Castle Baldwyn, partly because the roads are unsafe for you to traverse alone; but chiefly that we may express to the Baron, in person, our regret for the mistake that has inadvertently been made."

Father Eustace would have remonstrated against this resolution, but King Gryffyth had already quitted the apartment; and his followers, either really misapprehending what he said, or affecting to do so, at once replaced him on his mule, and compelled him to resume his journey in their company. It was in vain that he intimated to them that he now wished to return to Castle Baldwyn, instead of proceeding on his pilgrimage. They only shook their heads in token that they could not understand his meaning, and continued to urge the mule forward; nor did they once lose sight of him until, late in the following day, the shrine of St. Winifred was reached.

Meanwhile it was announced to Reginald, after the delay of half an hour, that Gryffyth was about to set forth. His train consisted of a handful of retainers, better armed and accoutred than the men who had

seized him, but otherwise resembling them in appearance. The king was mounted on one of the small horses then generally used by the Welsh, and another, similar in appearance, had been provided for Reginald, who was placed on his right hand ; while on the left rode a man who, from his speech and costume, appeared to be a Norman of rank. During the journey they both conversed goodhumouredly with their young companion ; and he, frank and open by nature, and unsuspicious of any evil design, replied unreservedly to the questions put to him.

"I remember," said the Norman, "when I was your age, fair sir, that I have re-entered my father's castle at a later hour even than this: though, sooth to say, our visit to the Baron de Worde will be somewhat of the latest."

"Ah, I doubt not that," observed the Welshman, "but I judge on such occasions thou didst not ride up and wind thy horn before the great gate of the castle, as our young friend will do anon. I guess thou hadst been playing the truant, and wert glad to creep in by some back-door or window, unknown to the warders."

"It may have been so," returned the Norman. "Youth will be youth, thou knowest ; and in those days I regarded my neck as of but little value. Well, those days are gone by, and the youth of the present

day are too fond of their own worshipful safety to risk aught of the kind. Sometimes I judge that the manhood of England will be all but extinct in another generation."

"Nay," said Gryffyth, "but what says the young Baron de Worde to such a charge on the rising chivalry of the day? I doubt he will admit that they are in such matters any jot behind their fathers."

"I will be judged by Baron Reginald himself in this matter," said the Norman. "Can he say that he has ever climbed through window or loophole of his father's castle by night, heeding little of the danger that might accompany such an attempt?"

"Ah, that have I!" exclaimed the lad, whose cheek had reddened at the imputation of cowardice, thus indirectly cast upon him. "More than once have I done so, though I take shame to myself for having disobeyed so kind a grandsire as mine. See you yonder window?" he continued, pointing to one at some height from the ground (for they had now approached close to Castle Baldwyn—scarce a bow-shot, in fact, from the walls). "The iron stanchions in it have become decayed, and may be pushed on one side. Twice or thrice, when I have lingered beyond the hour at which the gates are closed, have I entered by that way: though I have made a vow, which I mean to keep, never to do so again."

"Yonder window, mean you, the third from the ground, in the angle of that tower?" inquired the Norman, pointing with his lance.

"Even so," replied the boy; "but we have now arrived. I will sound my horn to summon the warders, who will receive you with all fitting courtesy."

"Tarry awhile," said the Welshman, laying his hand on the bugle, which the other was about to raise to his lips, "or rather give me the horn. It were more fitting that I should announce my own arrival."

The boy started as the bugle was torn from his grasp, and seemed about to offer some resistance; but his assailant, with a fierce imprecation, laid one hand on his collar, while with the other he brandished his drawn dagger before his eyes.

"Be silent," said he, "for your life. If you raise but the slightest cry, you die by my hand!"

Bewildered and surprised, the boy sat motionless: while Gryffyth, summoning his followers round him, gave them some rapid orders; and the whole body, throwing aside their white mantles, moved cautiously up to the window indicated by Reginald. The latter glanced hurriedly round him, aware at last of the snare into which he had been betrayed. From the edge of the wood to the outer defences of the castle the plain was covered by a multitude of dark figures

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creeping stealthily, but swiftly along; their numbers being far more than sufficient to overwhelm the Norman garrison, should they once succeed in gaining admission to the castle. In an agony of self-reproach and grief he watched the followers, whom Gryffyth had first sent forward, mount one after the other, with the agility of wild cats, to the window which he had incautiously pointed out, and disappear silently through it. In a few minutes more the sentinels would have been overpowered, and the massacre of all the inmates of the castle must have ensued—but that the boy, starting at last from his stupor, wrested himself from the Welshman's grasp, and seizing the bugle from him, wound a blast so loud and prolonged, as to arouse instantly the attention of the warders. The cry of "De Worde! De Worde!" was raised on the battlements, and in the court-yard beneath. It was followed almost immediately by another shout of "Treason! treason! To arms! to arms!" and the clash of weapons, and the shouts of men engaged in a deadly combat, re-echoed through the castle. Gryffyth's troops poured up on all sides, escalading the battlements by the help of the rude ladders which they had brought for the purpose, and succeeded, after a desperate resistance, in gaining possession of all the outer defences. Had it not been for Reginald's warning, not one of the Normans would have escaped. As it

was, their superior discipline and military skill enabled them to draw together, in spite of overwhelming numbers of the enemy, into the keep ; and thence to escape by the postern gate into the woods at the back of the castle, before their manœuvre was discovered by the Welsh.

The early dawn of the morning revealed to Gryffyth that his victory had not been a bloodless one. A great many of his followers, together with some of the Norman men-at-arms, lay dead, or dying, on the battlements, and in front of the keep. He gnashed his teeth with rage when he beheld the spectacle, and remembered that nothing but the boldness of a boy had occasioned the death of his retainers, and the escape of his deadly enemy. Seating himself in the hall, and in the baron's chair, he commanded young Reginald to be brought before him. At the same instant that he was led in, the Norman, who had been addressed by Gryffyth as Sir Aymeric, entered the apartment. He had just returned from a vain attempt to overtake the retreat of the garrison.

"They have escaped," he exclaimed. "It is vain to follow them. Ere this they will almost have reached Ludlow. It is a most unhappy mischance. Our prey is wrested from us at the very moment when it was within our grasp. But we will have our revenge."

ill this minute!" exclaimed Gryffyth, seizing by the throat with his left hand, while with the right he plucked his dagger from his girdle. The instant he would have plunged it into the breast of the youth—who, though pale as death, did not entreaty, and evinced no symptom of fear. Sir Aymeric arrested his arm.

"Not so hasty," exclaimed the latter. "To stab him were but poor revenge."

"Leave him aside, De Brenton," exclaimed Gryffyth, "His death shall atone for the blood, of which we have baulked us."

"I will," said the Norman, coolly; "to that I make no objection; but he will be more useful to our revenge alive than dead. Hark thou, Dennis," he continued, turning to the squire, "make search in this castle, for the most secret and least accessible room which it contains, and either convey this boy; and station two men, one at the door of the apartment, and the other in the staircase leading to it; and permit no one but the king or myself to pass them. See you added, when the squire had left the room, that this lad is once dead, we lose the hold over the castle of De Worde, which his capture would otherwise give us. I would advise that a messenger be immediately sent, demanding that the castle be restored to us, with peaceable possession, or this boy

shall perish—perish not by the sword, but by a lingering and painful death.”

“Thou art right, Sir Norman,” said Gryffyth. “Thy wit was ever greater than mine. See thou to the secure custody of the prisoner, and the dispatch of the envoy, while I take proper measures for the security of the castle.”

It was about three days after this that a monk presented himself at the gate of the castle, and demanded to be led to the presence of King Gryffyth. There was some demur to his admission. By his speech he was evidently a Norman; and one of the warders, thought he recognised in him the fellow-traveller of the young Baron de Worde, whom they had seized on his way to the shrine of St. Winifred a few days before. It was not till a messenger had been dispatched to ascertain the pleasure of the Welsh king on the subject, that he was at length allowed to enter.

Gryffyth was seated with his guest over a flagon of choice wine, which had doubtless been fetched from Baron Raoul's cellar. His mood appeared to be less sullen than was ordinarily the case, or it is likely that he would not have suffered his visitor to approach his presence at all.

“Well, Sir Monk,” he exclaimed, as Father Eustace entered, for he it was; “come you from the

Baron de Worde? What are the terms he proposes now? Has he thought better of his rejection of my offers?"

"I know not," replied the monk; "nor have I seen the Baron since we last met. But I have learnt that you have seized and detained as a prisoner, his grandson Reginald."

He paused, expecting a reply, but Gryffyth did not speak, and Father Eustace resumed.

"If that be so, I would inquire what ransom you demand for his release; and if it be reasonable, am prepared to give due surety for its payment."

"His ransom," said Gryffyth, "is the peaceful surrender of this castle to me, its lawful owner."

"The Baron de Worde cannot surrender to you that which he holds in behalf of his liege sovereign, King Henry II.; and surely you will not detain a boy of his years in bondage."

"Not long," exclaimed Gryffyth, fiercely. "You say right, monk. If Raoul persist in refusing my demand, in a few days his grandson will be released."

"How!" exclaimed Father Eustace, startled at the Welshman's manner.

"By death," answered the other, sternly. "I know not how long his frame may resist the pangs of hunger; but whatsoever period that may reach to, will be the duration of his life."

"You cannot mean it," exclaimed the monk, horror-stricken. "Such a deed, even if you dread not the vengeance of Heaven, would bring on you a fearful retribution at the hands of the De Worde."

"I fear neither," said Gryffyth boldly. "But think not that I would debar him from such spiritual consolation as thou canst offer him. If Psalms and Litanies will compensate him for the loss of bread and meat, I will not grudge them to him. What ho, warder ! conduct this priest to the chamber where the prisoner is confined. Search him carefully, that he carry in no particle of food ; or, by all the saints in the calendar, thou shalt suffer the like punishment thyself."

Overpowered by grief and astonishment, Father Eustace followed the Welshman up a winding staircase to the highest tower of the keep, where his beloved pupil was confined. It was somewhat strange, he thought, that they had selected the monk's own apartment for the purpose ; but he had little time to waste on this reflection. Young Reginald de Worde was seated on the ground ; for every particle of furniture had been removed from the room, not even a heap of straw being allowed him, for fear it should supply him with the means of protracting life. He had already been kept without food for two days. His lips were dry and parched, and his eyes wild with famine. He had been traversing the apartment, as a



"Ah, you can give me no hope!"—p. 57.



savage animal traverses its prison, almost the entire day ; and had now sunk on the floor, exhausted with the exertion. Notwithstanding his desperate condition, and the keen pangs he had already undergone, the bold and chivalrous spirit of his race had not deserted him ; nor had he uttered lamentation, or entreaty for mercy. Now, however, when he beheld Father Eustace enter the apartment, his constancy gave way, and, throwing himself upon his neck, he burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh ! Father Eustace," he exclaimed, "have you come to deliver me from these dreadful pains ? Has my grandfather consented ? No, I cannot believe that ! But tell me, are you come to save me ?"

"Alas ! my child," exclaimed Father Eustace, "I would gladly give my life for yours," and tears stood in his eyes as he spoke.

"Ah ! you can give me no hope," said the boy, despairingly. "Will not our Normans attempt the recapture of the Castle ? It was only by stratagem, you know, that these base Welshmen gained the day. In a fair field, though they had been twenty to one, they would have fled from us, as the deer from the hunter."

"They will assault it, doubtless," replied Father Eustace ; "but days, perhaps weeks must elapse, before the Baron de Worde can call a sufficient force to ensure success. The main body of his followers is in

King Henry's camp ; and though a messenger has been sent to summon them, they must be several days on the march."

"Then there is no hope for me," said the boy ; and covering his face with his hands, he tried in vain to suppress the sobs which shook his frame. "Oh Father, it is such agony to bear ! Cannot you give me but one morsel of food—only one morsel ? If I could only eat but this once, I think I should endure it better afterwards."

The monk shook his head mournfully, as he watched his pupil's imploring gestures ; when suddenly it occurred to him that the Welsh were altogether ignorant of the recess behind the tapestry—in which, as the reader has already heard, the monk usually kept a few flasks of foreign wine, used for the celebration of private masses. Doubtless these might supply the means of protracting the boy's life for a day or two, though scarcely more ; and perhaps it would be but cruel kindness to prolong his pangs, where there was but so faint a hope of ultimate deliverance. But the sight of Reginald's face silenced all his doubts. Hastily calling the boy to him, he pressed his finger on the spring of the secret door and anxiously scrutinized the contents of the closet. Alas ! there was but one flask left ; and when Reginald had drained this, as he did to the last drop without a moment's pause, the monk replaced the

vessel with a sigh, as he reflected that to-morrow would but witness deeper disappointment than to-day. He stood for a long time gazing into the dark recesses of the closet, apparently lost in thought. Then starting from his reverie, he closed carefully the secret door; and promising to return as early on the following day as the warder would permit, he took his leave.

"How find you the poor child?" asked the soldier in the Welsh language, with which Father Eustace was sufficiently acquainted to converse. "He is a Norman, and a De Worde; yet I had a lad once of his age, and I cannot hearken to his restless pacing to and fro without feeling somewhat softer-hearted than is my wont. Think you he will linger long?"

"Not many hours," returned Father Eustace, sadly. "I will return hither as early to-morrow as you will admit me; I trust in time to administer the last rites of our holy Church to him."

"Soft you, Father," said the attendant, who by Gryffyth's orders had accompanied him, "but there go two words to that bargain. I have the king's order to admit you to the young baron when you will, so only that I search carefully your person ere doing so. But during the remainder of your time you are my prisoner; nor can I suffer you to quit my company, even for a minute."

The monk looked much chagrined at this informa-

tion, but it was in vain to resist. He accompanied the soldier to the apartment which had been assigned him, and after some slight refreshment retired to his bed, though with little hope of rest.

It was late in the forenoon of the next day, when the Welsh king was again informed that Father Eustace desired to be admitted to his presence. He was on the point of returning an angry refusal, when the peculiarly grave look of the soldier who had brought the message struck his attention; and, imagining that the Father might have tidings of importance to communicate, he changed his purpose.

"Well, monk," he exclaimed, as his visitor was introduced, "are you come to renew your entreaties? Do you hold me to be so weak of purpose, that a few smooth or sharp words, as the case may be, will induce me to spare an enemy, whom I have sworn to slay? Ha! is that the errand on which thou hast come?"

"It is not, replied Father Eustace; "I ask nothing for the living, and I deem that even thou warrest not with the dead."

"The dead!" repeated the king, not noticing the taunt; "what, so soon——"

"He was but a boy," interrupted the monk, sternly, "and could not long resist your cruelty."

Gryffyth turned upon him fiercely. "Beware, Sir Priest," he exclaimed, "that you provoke not my

patience too far. I am no Henry of Anjou, to be bearded and browbeaten by a shaveling such as thou. If the boy is dead, he was my captive, and provoked his doom. But I will have sure proof that there is no treachery at work. What ho, Morgan! bear my greeting to Sir Aymeric de Brenton, and request that he attend me to young Reginald's chamber."

"He rode forth an hour ago with his men-at-arms, to examine the passes in the direction of Ludlow," returned the attendant.

"Then do thou thyself accompany me. Lead the way, monk, and woe to thee if I find that thou hast deceived me."

With a sad but firm step, Father Eustace conducted the Welsh monarch and his chamberlain to the apartment in which Reginald had been confined. Commanding the sentinel at the door to throw it open and enter with him, Gryffyth stepped without hesitation into the chamber. A glance was sufficient to assure him that he had not been deceived. The body, wrapped in a robe of white linen, lay stretched on the upper garment of the monk, which had been reverently spread for its reception. The hands, cold, stiff, and colourless, were crossed on the bosom, and the features, attenuated and ghastly, as even the dead rarely appear, were too surely those of a corpse. The warder started back, amazed at the change which death had produced

in the face, which he had noticed with compassion but a few hours before. Even the Welsh king, stubborn of heart as he was, turned aside from the spectacle, and briefly giving permission for the burial of the body, retired to his chamber. The funeral rites were hurried on with all possible speed, for all were anxious to remove every trace of the foul crime which had been committed ; and the same night the remains were interred in the chapel of the castle.

Father Eustace was not suffered to depart, nor was the vigilance of his gaolers relaxed. But he was treated with a kind of sullen respect, and permitted, at his special request, to occupy the chamber in which the unhappy Reginald had been confined, and which, as you lads are aware, was his own. The warders seldom entered it ; for a belief was current among them, that it was haunted by the spirit of the murdered boy : and one went so far as to say that he had seen his figure, clothed in white, and apparently holding converse with Father Eustace, when he ventured one night to peer through the crevices of the door.

A few weeks afterwards, the troops of the Baron de Worde, aided by some forces which Henry had despatched to their support, laid siege to the castle, and after a series of desperate encounters, succeeded in storming it. The Welshmen fought with a fury which compensated for the inferiority of their armour and

want of military discipline. Driven from point to point, they continued to make good the portion of the defences which they still held ; and it was only when their numbers were so thinned that they could no longer offer effectual resistance, that the survivors threw down their arms. Early in the day, the fate of the young Baron de Worde had been made known to the Normans by some prisoners captured at the first onset ; and it so roused their fury, that it was with difficulty that their leaders could secure quarter for those who yielded themselves prisoners. Gryffyth and Aymeric de Brenton in particular, who had fought to the last, and been overwhelmed by force of numbers, would have been instantly sacrificed to their rage, but that Raoul himself threw his shield over them ; reminding his soldiers that instant inquiry would be made into the truth of what had been affirmed, and if they should be found to be guilty, they would forthwith receive the reward of their crimes.

Accordingly, with as little delay as possible, the great hall was arranged for the trial of the prisoners. The Baron de Worde, together with the knights and nobles whom Henry had despatched to his assistance, took their seats at the upper end ; and the Welsh king and his Norman ally were led in, and placed before him. Neither of them appeared to have lost

their hardihood, though placed in circumstances so desperate. Gryffyth rolled his fierce eye round the assembly; encountering, without quailing, the glances of scorn and detestation which were levelled at him; while the bearing of the Norman, though more sullen, was fully as determined.

"Gryffyth, King of Powysland, and Aymeric de Brenton," said Raoul, "you are our captives, taken in battle, and in violent and lawless outrage. As such your lives are at our disposal. Yet will we waive that right, and hold you to fair and honourable ransom, if you will produce to us, alive and uninjured, the heir of our house, whom you have treacherously seized and imprisoned."

A glance of savage triumph shot from under the red eyebrows of the Welsh king.

"Norman," he said, "we are your prisoners, and you may work your will. If the boy were still in my power, I would not yield him up to you, though my life were the forfeiture. But he has passed from my grasp into that of one, from whom the power of all your race will never wrest him. Even the Norman, all-powerful as he deems himself, cannot break the bondage of the grave."

A thrill of horror ran through the assembled throng.

"And meanest thou then," exclaimed the baron, in

a voice of mingled indignation and horror, "that the detestable tale which I have learnt from thy followers is really true? Can it be possible that thou hast indeed murdered my grandson—murdered him," gasped the old man, his grief overpowering his wrath, "in cold blood, and by the most horrible and painful of deaths?"

"Yes, proud Raoul," interposed Aymeric, "it *is* true. He died a death, yet more agonising than that to which thou didst subject my brother. Poor is thy triumph to-day after all; for if the last of the line of De Brenton perish in me, yet thou too, old man, art already childless."

A shout of execration burst from De Worde's followers, amidst which the voice of the old baron was again heard.

"Lead them to the block," he said, "and let instant execution be done on them."

But at the same moment that his retainers were about to obey his command, a cry of wonder and exultation arose from the lower end of the hall, and a voice was heard shouting aloud, "Room for the heir of De Worde! Room for the Baron Reginald!"

All started to their feet as they heard the words. The throng gave way on either side, and Father Eustace was seen advancing through the midst, lead-

ing by the hand a noble boy, pale and emaciated indeed, but otherwise uninjured.

"Oh, how jolly!" shouted Tom. "I thought it would be the most abominable thing if the poor fellow had really been starved to death. I should like to have seen how the Welshman and his friend looked, when Father Eustace produced him alive! I hope they cut off those two fellows' heads all the same—didn't they, Dr. Bowles?"

"You may be sure they did," observed Mr. Hartopp, who had roused himself to listen, having for once in a way really felt some interest in what had been related. "You may be sure they did. Those were not days when judges and juries were over-scrupulous about capital punishment; or Secretaries of State were beset by petitions to save every rascal from the gallows—all the more urgent in proportion to the atrocity of the offence. Make yourself easy, Tom; I'll be bound they were both beheaded within ten minutes of the restoration of the boy—doubtless by way of celebrating it in the most suitable manner."

"Well, but were they, Dr. Bowles?" persisted Tom, not satisfied with this unauthentic assurance.

"Hem!" said Dr. Bowles, "Mr. Hartopp chances to be accidentally correct in this instance. But I

do not agree with him about our forefathers in respect of their judicial punishments——”

“Dr. Bowles,” broke in Richard, who had not heard the by-play with Mr. Hartopp—happily cutting short what threatened to be an alarming discussion, “how in the world could Reginald have come to life again, when the king saw his dead body; and he was afterwards buried in the chapel of the castle?”

“I know,” said Selina. “He was buried alive, and Father Eustace found it out afterwards, and took him out of his coffin again.”

“No, that couldn’t have been,” said Archie, “because Father Eustace was kept a close prisoner, and was watched day and night.”

“No,” said Tom; “he only shammed to be dead. Wasn’t that it, Dr. Bowles?”

“No,” said the tutor, “I don’t think that would have been possible. At all events, that was not it. Think a little now.”

The little party sat silent for several minutes. At last Charlie burst out.

“I have it! I have it!” he cried; “it was the wax figure.”

“Yes,” said Dr. Bowles; “you have guessed it. You remember that Father Eustace had placed the image for security in the secret recess of his apartment some months before. He had forgotten its existence;

but, in examining the closet, to see if he could discover any fragments of food, he lit upon it. It occurred to him that he might dress the figure in the boy's clothes; when it would bear so close a resemblance to a dead body, that no one, unless they were aware of the existence of the figure, would suspect the stratagem. Reginald himself was concealed by day in the secret closet; and by night the superstitious fears of the sentinels prevented them from discovering, what otherwise perhaps could not have escaped detection."

CHAPTER III.

THE next day was no improvement on its predecessors. The snow had ceased to fall ; but the frost was, if possible, more severe than ever. The roads were everywhere impassable, except where the gardeners had swept narrow paths to enable the servants to go about their daily work. The elder children would fain have commenced the preparations for the Twelfth Night Theatricals ; which had laid so forcible a hold on their imagination as to drive out for the time every other idea. But unluckily Tom Davis, the carpenter, lived at the further end of the village, and the way to his cottage was completely blocked with snow. At present it was impossible even to speak to him on the subject ; and without his help and counsel the very first foundations of their work could not be laid. Selina did indeed suggest that the manuscript of the play should be read through, and the various parts assigned to the actors ; but this scheme also was nipped in the bud. It was found that the Squire was closeted with his bailiff ; who had taken advantage of the suspension of work to lay his half-yearly accounts

before his master. Orders had been given that no one was to interrupt the business in hand on any pretext whatsoever; and venturesome as the children were, not even Selina, her father's prime favourite, presumed to disobey this injunction. It was plain that the manuscript could not be procured that day; and they were thrown back on their own resources. After long consultation and much entreaty, the six elders (for Charlie Marchmont was counted as one of the Branches) had obtained leave to go out for the purpose of making a large snowball on the lawn; and they might now be seen from the windows moving their white mountain along, by the aid of levers placed under it, until it grew so massive that two of the gardeners and a stable-keeper had to be called in to assist its progress. Their merry shouts and glowing cheeks were good evidence how greatly they enjoyed the fun. But the poor little Underwoods could only stand at the window, and sigh over their imprisonment; which the spectacle of the unrestrained freedom of their elders rendered the more unwelcome. At last they broke out into open mutiny. Crowding round the table, at which Mrs. Wood was seated engaged in writing, they clamorously demanded that some amusement should be found for them, which, if not equivalent to that which the Branches were enjoying, would at all events prove some substitute for it.

"Well, Gerty," said Mrs. Wood, smiling at the little rebel, who appeared to be the chief spokeswoman of the party, "I am very sorry for your misfortunes; but I do not know how I can help the ground being covered with snow, or your being only ten years old. But I will do my best, as you say, to make up to you for your troubles. What is it that you want me to do?"

There was a rather embarrassed silence, for the children, like many grown-up persons, did not really know what they wanted. At last Willie broke the silence.

"Mamma," he said, "I heard Tom and Ellen last night talking to one another about a story Dr. Bowles had read to them after we had gone to bed. I want you please, mamma, to tell us the story now."

Mrs. Wood smiled again.

"I'm afraid I can't do that, my dear," she said. "In the first place, I don't think I could recollect it; and in the next, I don't think you would understand it. But I'll tell you what I can do for you. I think I can tell you a story myself. It is a fairy tale which was told me a great many years ago by my governess. I think I can recollect it, if you would like to hear it."

A cry of delight was the ready answer.

"Oh yes, mamma," said Gerty; "a fairy tale, with

dragons and genii and wicked enchanters ! That will be delightful."

"And flying horses, and men who were really men, but seemed to be lions or apes," added Ethel.

"And trees with golden boughs ; and pearls and rubies and diamonds growing upon them," put in little Hugh, following suit. "And a giant with two heads—please, mamma, let there be a giant with two heads !"

"Well," said Mrs. Wood, "I do not know how far I can promise that, Hughie, or all the other essentials insisted on ; but there will be at least some of these things. Now you know I always make one stipulation, which is that no one interrupts me. Do you promise that ?"

The children readily assented, and Mrs. Wood commenced the Tale of

PRINCE REDAD.

A great many years ago there was a king who ruled over a large country, and was very powerful and prosperous. There was only one drawback to his happiness ; and that was, that he had no heir to succeed him on the throne. A great many sons had been born to him, but they had all died when they were quite young. One had been drowned in a lake near the

palace ; another had been struck by an arrow shot by one of his young companions ; a third had been killed by a wolf, while he was straying a short distance from his father's castle. In fact, all had perished by one kind of casualty or another ; and the grief of the poor king grew more and more inconsolable with each successive loss. When the last of his sons had been taken from him, an aged councillor, who for many years had ceased to take any share in public business, demanded an audience of him.

"O king," said he, "be comforted. Though your loss be grievous, you are still in the vigour of life, and may have other sons to supply the place of those you have lost."

"Alas!" said the king, "that thought, far from comforting me, is full of sorrow. To what purpose should my hopes again be raised, if again they are to be succeeded by disappointment and woe?"

"They need not be so, O king," said the councillor. "I am persuaded that your misfortunes have been caused by the machinations of some secret enemy, who is exercising an evil influence over your family. Listen to me. Not many miles hence there resides a potent magician ; who will, I am persuaded, not only explain to you why and whence it is that these calamities have fallen upon you, but will also point out some mode of deliverance from them. As soon as

you hear that the queen is likely to present you with another child, repair to his abode and invoke his aid. You must go alone, and by night—for thus only will he receive visitors. Nor need you offer him any reward for his counsel; he will accept none.”

The king thanked the old man, and promised to follow his advice. Not long afterwards he learned that another child was likely soon to make its appearance in the world; and, remembering what had passed at the interview, he set out secretly by night for the magician’s dwelling.

“King of the Hundred Isles,” said the magician, “You have done well to come hither. Your person and your errand are alike well known to me. I have heard of your justice and beneficence, and will willingly do all I can to help you. The jealousy of a powerful necromancer, who was a suitor for your wife’s hand, and whom she rejected in your favour, has been the cause of the calamities which you have sustained. A prince will soon be born to you, who will be brave, handsome, and amiable, and whose prosperity will be uninterrupted, if the evil influence of the necromancer be overcome. I am unable to do anything more than warn you of three perils which will await him. If he can escape these, he will succeed you on the throne, and reign long and happily. Let him be careful never to mount a black horse—never to

fight with a black man—nor woo a lady who has black hair and black eyes.”

The king returned home, and before long a young prince was born, who was named Redad, and who, as everybody declared, was the loveliest and finest baby that had ever been seen. The king, who bore in mind the warning of the magician, gave the most particular instructions to his Master of the Horse never to allow a black horse to enter his stables. He published a royal proclamation, banishing all negroes from his dominions ; and, though he could not prevent young ladies with black hair and eyes from being born into the world, or banish them as he had the black men, yet he forbade them, under the heaviest penalties, to approach the royal palace, or to appear in the presence of his son.

These precautions appeared to be successful. The prince grew up the handsomest and most accomplished youth of his day, beloved by all who shared his society. One day, when he was about one-and-twenty years old, he was hunting with his companions in one of the royal forests, and in the course of the morning found that he had been separated from his train, and had wandered to some part of the wood with which he was unacquainted. He wound his horn repeatedly, but there was no reply. At last he flung the reins on his horse's neck, and resolved to trust to his instinct

to find the way to his stable again. The horse proceeded quietly enough for more than an hour, when the prince's attention was attracted by loud cries for help, which proceeded from a dense thicket at some little distance. He instantly drew his sword, and spurred his horse to the spot whence the cries seemed to come. Here he found three armed men attacking a dwarf, who had set his back against a tree, and though desperately wounded, was defending himself with the most determined courage. The prince, seeing the inequality of the odds, cut the foremost down with his scimitar, and the dwarf, taking advantage of the surprise which the prince's arrival had occasioned, ran another of the ruffians through the body. The third took to flight; but the prince, stringing his bow, discharged an arrow after him, which struck him in the back, and pierced his vitals, so that he, too, dropped dead on the ground. Prince Redad now alighted to help the wounded man, who was leaning against the tree, exhausted and bleeding.

"Noble youth," he said, "your succour has come too late. But I thank you none the less, and will expend my last breath in requiting you to the best of my ability. I can tell you a charm which in a moment subdues the fiercest and most untameable horse, and renders it as tractable as though it had been trained from a colt. Listen to the words, and

repeat them after me, for I shall die happier, knowing that you have the secret."

The prince, who thought that the dwarf's mind was wandering from the pain of his wounds, nevertheless complied with his request, and repeated the words several times at his dictation, until the other was satisfied that he would recollect them.

A few moments afterwards he expired.

Redad threw the four bodies into a pit, which he found near the spot, and covered them as well as he was able with stones and leaves. He then remounted his horse; which in a few hours brought him safe back to his hunting-seat.

The same night, after the prince and all his servants had retired to rest, the household was disturbed by a loud knocking at the gate. When this was opened, a horseman was discovered, still keeping the saddle, and holding a led horse by the rein. He was charged with a message to the prince—that the king, his father, had suddenly been seized with a dangerous illness, and was, it was feared, at the point of death. He had sent a trusty servant to desire the immediate presence of his son, together with a horse from his stable, that no time might be lost in saddling one for his use. The prince, overcome by sorrow, caught up his hat and cloak, for he had not yet laid aside his clothes for the night, and hurried down to the gate. The night was so dark,

that it was scarcely possible to distinguish one object from another, and he had neither time nor inclination to make a careful scrutiny. He flung himself, without a moment's delay, on the back of the charger which the royal messenger was still holding for his use, and both horses immediately sprang forward at their utmost speed. For some time Prince Redad could think of nothing but his father's danger, and his hope that, on his arrival, he might find that the crisis was safely passed. But after a while, he could not help remarking, that the road which they were traversing was one wholly unknown to him. He shouted to his attendant, but he received no answer; and the moon at that moment breaking forth from the clouds, which had long obscured it, he perceived that his companion had left him, and that his horse was pursuing a wild career—not along the road to his father's palace, but over a dreary expanse of moor. He strove in vain to check its course, and had he not been an accomplished horseman, he would have been unable to retain his seat. Nothing seemed to bar the way or exhaust the speed of the fiery animal. Hour after hour passed on, and at length the day broke, and they were still hurrying forward with unabated fury. As the first ray of the sun fell on the landscape, Prince Redad observed that the horse which he bestrode was a coal black charger, without a single

speck of white from mane to tail. In an instant the prediction of the magician flashed upon his recollection. He saw that he had been entrapped into the power of his enemy ; and he nerved himself to meet the danger as well as he was able. They had now passed the moor over which they had hitherto been speeding, and were traversing a country strewn with large masses of stone, and broken into precipitous descents, over which it would be certain death to be carried. The horse bounded over fragments of rock, which the boldest rider would never have ventured to attempt ; and it was only by the exertion of his utmost strength and skill, that Prince Redad could prevent himself from being hurled from the saddle. At length he saw that the steed was hurrying onward to the edge of a huge crag, over which in a few minutes it would carry him, unless he could check or divert its career. For a moment he surrendered himself to despair ; but the next, the recollection of the talisman given him by the dwarf broke upon him. He resolved at least to try the effect of it, as the sole remaining chance between him and death, and uttered aloud the words which had been taught him. They were now within fifty yards of the verge of the precipice ; but the moment that the charm had been spoken, the horse stayed his flight, and stood as still and docile as the best trained steed in his father's

stable. Wearied out with his terrible ride, the prince dismounted, and wrapping himself in his cloak, laid down to sleep, while his companion kept watch at his side, as a faithful dog waits on his master. About noon he awoke refreshed, and again mounting his charger, rode homewards at an easy pace. He arrived at the royal palace about the hour of sunset, and found his father and all the court in the utmost alarm at his disappearance. When the king was informed of his son's return, he hurried forth eagerly to meet him. Beholding him mounted on a sable steed, his alarm again broke forth in loud exclamations. But Redad, springing lightly to the ground, gave the reins to a groom, whom he charged to take the utmost care of his newly acquired possession ; and then, accompanying his father into the house, detailed to him the strange occurrences of the day.

The first danger had been happily surmounted ; but the old king was, nevertheless, anxious and disturbed. He had no doubt that the pretended messenger had been the necromancer in disguise. It was but too evident therefore that the bitterness of his enmity was unabated, and it was only by a fortunate chance, such as could not be looked for again, that the prince had escaped death. He pondered over the dangers which still threatened his son's life, and was convinced that the second of the two, which still remained, was

the most to be dreaded. He had succeeded in banishing from his dominions all the negroes who might before have been found in them. But there were maidens innumerable with dark eyes and tresses ; and he knew that to forbid his son to seek their society, was the surest of all modes of inducing him to think of them. He commenced a series of court festivities, to which he invited the handsomest blondes to be found in the neighbourhood : in the hope that the prince would conceive an attachment for some one among them, and so relieve him from the disquietude which haunted him day and night.

But Prince Redad appeared to care nothing for the beautiful syrens ; whose loyalty, as well as whose inclination, induced them to second, to the best of their ability, their sovereign's wishes. He only attended the court balls in compliance with his father's invitation, and passed his whole mornings in hunting, or some similar pursuit. At length a war broke out with a neighbouring king, and the prince solicited permission to lead the troops to battle. As neither of the dangers impending over him had any direct connection with warfare, the king consented ; and Prince Redad set out on the campaign full of martial eagerness. They soon entered the enemy's country, and the prince, who was of a merciful disposition, forbade his soldiers to plunder the property, or take

the lives of the peaceful peasantry. But there were in his army some troops who had long been employed in hostilities with the barbarous tribes on the edge of the king's dominions, and had become so used to bloodshed and pillage, that their officers could not restrain them. Tales were brought to Redad's ear of frightful outrages offered to the defenceless inhabitants, in defiance of his proclamation; and he resolved that he would make an example of the first whom he should find so offending. It was not long before an incident of this kind occurred.

It was his practice, as a prudent general, to visit occasionally the outposts of his camp by night, and make sure that a careful watch was observed. One evening while he was engaged on this duty, he saw at some distance a bright light, which appeared to proceed from a hut or cottage in flames. Accompanied by only two of his followers, he proceeded in the direction of the fire. On reaching the spot he found that his conjectures were correct. A party of his soldiers were engaged in plundering the abode of a wood-cutter; who, with his eldest son, had offered a brave but useless resistance to the marauders. When Redad entered the cottage, he found the ruffians, who were five in number, pillaging the woodcutter's wife of the little money she possessed, while the bodies of her husband and eldest son lay dead on the floor.

The plunderers, who at once recognised Prince Redad, knew that their lives were forfeited, and resolved to kill him and his followers as their only chance of escape. The prince and his comrades defended themselves bravely, and, after a desperate encounter, all five of the soldiers were slain, or mortally wounded, as well as both the attendants of the prince, leaving the latter alone unhurt. As he was on the point of quitting the cottage, the wife of the woodcutter flung herself at his feet.

"I am unable to thank you as I ought," she said, "for your rescue of myself and my children from the hands of these murderers; yet I would fain do something to show my gratitude. My husband in his youth was a soldier, and was once presented with a gorget of strange construction; which he was assured would prove of extraordinary value to its wearer. He has long laid it aside; but if he had worn it to-day, doubtless these ruffians would not have succeeded in their combat with him. Whoever you may be, will you wear it as a token of my gratitude?"

As she spoke she put into his hands a steel gorget of foreign workmanship, to the outside of which a number of steel blades were attached, the edges of which were as keen as a razor.

The prince thanked her, assuring her that she should be protected, and her future maintenance

cared for. Then clasping the gorget round his throat—more because he did not wish to seem to despise her present, than because he regarded it as of any special value—he left the cottage, and returned to the camp.

A few days afterwards they learned that the enemy was advancing to meet them. Strange rumours soon began to pervade the camp, of some allies which the enemy had lately obtained, whose weapons and mode of fighting were quite different from those known to any civilised nation. It was said that these new auxiliaries were negroes : that the king of the negroes—having heard of the proclamation made by Prince Redad's father, commanding all blacks to quit his dominions—had sent a choice body of troops to assist the enemy, in revenge for that indignity. About noon on the following day spies came in with the intelligence that the enemy were close at hand ; and shortly afterwards an ambassador arrived ; who was charged to invite the three most approved champions of Prince Redad's army, to encounter in single combat three warriors of the opposite host. The prince accepted the challenge ; and in spite of the remonstrances of his generals, declared his resolution of being one of the three combatants himself. On the following morning both parties made their appearance in the lists ; and considerable surprise, as well as

uneasiness, was excited by the discovery, that one of the enemy's champions was a negro—not armed with scimitar and shield, like the other two, but simply equipped with a light sword slung round his waist, and a long cord in his hand, to which balls of lead were attached. He wore no armour—indeed his person, except for a cincture round the loins, and a turban on his head, was entirely undefended. Even Redad for a moment regretted his rashness, as he recalled the magician's warning. But it was now too late, for the signal for battle had already been sounded.

At the first onset he received on his shield the blow which his antagonist levelled at him, and requited it with a stroke of his scimitar, which laid him dead on the field. One of his two companions assailed the warrior opposed to him with such fury, that after the interchange of a few blows, both combatants fell mortally wounded from their saddles. But the third, who had been opposed to the Indian warrior, had met with a different fortune. At the moment of the encounter, the negro, instead of meeting his opponent face to face, turned his horse lightly on one side. Wheeling rapidly round, he cast his cord with such skill and effect, that the end, to which a leaden ball was attached, twisted itself round his antagonist's neck, and there remained firmly fixed; so that the Indian,

drawing the other end, pulled him half strangled from his seat, and with a blow of his sword dispatched him. There now remained but two of the champions alive—Prince Redad and the black—and these advanced amid the breathless silence of both armies, to encounter each other. The prince was the first to commence the attack. Seizing his spear he hurled it with so true an aim, that the negro only escaped by throwing himself nimbly from the saddle. But he sprang instantly on his horse again, and galloping behind the prince, a second time threw his fatal noose as before. It caught his adversary round the throat, where it remained firmly lodged. A groan of despair broke from his followers; and the black warrior again unsheathing his light sword, and drawing tight the end of the noose, galloped up to complete his victory. But the cord no sooner came in contact with the sharp edges of the gorget, than it parted asunder, and left the prince at liberty. The Indian, who was unprepared for such an occurrence, was unable to offer any resistance, and a blow from his adversary's sword struck his head from his shoulders. The enemy, seeing all their champions slain, fled in dismay; and a complete victory was gained by Prince Redad's army.

The prince followed up his success, and in a few *days entered the capital of the hostile king, where he*

found everything in the utmost alarm and disorder. The enemy had fled in such haste, that even the royal family had been unable to make their escape. The queen and her eldest daughter, Gulnare, a lovely blonde of seventeen, both fell into Prince Redad's power. They were overwhelmed with terror ; for all kinds of rumours respecting his stern and merciless disposition had reached their ears. But they speedily discovered that their anxieties were unfounded. Prince Redad received them with the utmost courtesy ; assuring them not only that they should be treated with all possible respect and honour, but that he would at the earliest opportunity send them under a proper escort to the camp of his rival. The princess was so struck by his handsome form and noble demeanour that she instantly conceived an ardent affection for him ; which increased every day, notwithstanding that the prince himself was unconscious of it. When the time came for her departure to her father's camp, she felt that it would be impossible for her to part from him. She bribed one of her waiting maids to take her place in the palanquin appointed for her conveyance, while she herself assumed the disguise of a page, and so accompanied Prince Redad on his return to his father's capital.

The old king was overjoyed at his son's success and safety. He heard with a shudder the history of his

combat with the negro, and the marvellous chance, by which he had escaped the second danger of which the magician had forewarned him. But the third and most deadly of all still remained ; and until that had been surmounted, he could have no peace. He redoubled his efforts to make the court and its beauties attractive to his son, but with no more success than before. Not long afterwards, however, to his great satisfaction, an embassy arrived from a neighbouring king, proposing an alliance between Prince Redad and his daughter. The former, though he declared that he had at that time no wish to marry, nevertheless assented to his father's earnest entreaty that he would at least visit the court of the King of Deryabar, and behold the lady offered to him as a bride. The prince accordingly departed with a large retinue, and journeyed for four or five days in security. But on the sixth day they were attacked by a herd of lions of extraordinary size and ferocity. Some of the horses were immediately torn down, and their riders slain ; while the others, struck with terror, fled in every direction. The prince and his page, whose horses had been mortally injured, and who were themselves wounded, contrived with difficulty to climb a tree—from whence they could see the savage animals engaged in devouring their victims. But when they had finished their repast, they did not depart as Redad had hoped that they would,

but remained on the spot, with the evident intention of waiting till the prince and his follower should be compelled to come down from their place of shelter, and fall into their power. The whole of that day and the night following passed in this manner; and Redad, maddened by hunger, was on the point of descending from the tree to sell his life as dearly as he could, when an arrow, shot by a skilful hand, struck one of the largest lions in the eye, and laid him dead on the ground. The shaft was succeeded by several more, discharged by the same dexterous hand; which wounded or killed so many of the animals, that the whole herd at length took to flight. A horn was then winded, and a forester, armed with a hunting-sword and a bow and arrows slung at his back, made his appearance on the scene. Redad and his companion lowered themselves from the tree, though with much difficulty, for they were both stiff with cold and hunger, and the prince's wound was a severe one. The forester advanced to greet them, and, perceiving their condition, conveyed them to his cottage, which stood at a little distance.

Here the prince was consigned to a comfortable couch, and his wounds skilfully dressed by the forester's daughter. But the injuries which he had received were so great, that it was several weeks before he could rise from his bed; and even then the time appeared to be still distant, when he could ven-

ture altogether to quit the cottage. The forester's daughter was unremitting in her attendance at his sick bed ; and the prince after awhile began to regard his nurse with a feeling which he had hitherto never bestowed on any woman. She was extremely beautiful, with the loveliest dark eyes, and hair of the glossiest sable, which was gathered in graceful masses round her ivory forehead. Prince Redad fought against the passion which he felt growing upon him, for he remembered the prophecy which the magician had delivered to his father. But love is a more potent enchanter than any earthly necromancer, and after awhile he yielded himself to its influence—satisfied with the argument, that one who had done so much towards the preservation of his life could never cause him injury. The maiden evidently perceived and requited his affection ; nor did the fact of their mutual attachment seem unacceptable to the forester. Prince Redad, in short, found his residence in the cottage so delightful, that he was in no hurry to leave it, even when his health was sufficiently restored to enable him to do so.

But there was one person who regarded the occurrences of the last few weeks in a very different light. This was the page, Ahmed, whose wound had been very slight, and was in a few days completely cured. He noticed the growing attachment between his

master and the forester's daughter with great uneasiness. One day, when the forester was absent on a hunting expedition, and the damsel chanced to have quitted the hut on some casual errand, he took the opportunity of warning his master of the perilous position in which he stood. He reminded him that his protracted absence would cause not only his father, but all the inhabitants of the Hundred Isles, the utmost anxiety. He repeated the warning of the magician, which had been so fully verified by events on two previous occasions ; and, finding that these arguments had no effect on the prince, proceeded lastly to assure him that the forester's daughter was only playing a subtle and dangerous game, but had no real affection for him. The prince was highly indignant at this suggestion ; and when Ahmed followed it up with an urgent entreaty, that he would at once quit the forest and return to his father's capital, he answered angrily that he would return thither without delay, but not before he had asked and obtained the hand of the maiden in marriage. More terrified than ever, Ahmed threw himself on his knees before his master, and implored him to forego his dangerous resolution. But the prince only replied by commanding Ahmed to quit his presence for ever ; and the page, overwhelmed with sorrow, was compelled to obey. He did not, however, leave the neighbourhood,

as he had been ordered to do ; but concealed himself in a cavern in the forest, where he resolved still to watch over the fortunes of his beloved master. The same evening, as soon as the forester returned to the cottage, Redad declared to him the passion he had conceived for his daughter, and entreated him to bestow her hand upon him. The forester replied, that he had no objection to raise, provided his daughter were willing to take the prince for a husband ; and again departing, left him to plead his own cause with the damsel.

The latter, as soon as the prince had declared the object of his visit, expressed great surprise at it, nor would she be persuaded for a long time that he was serious in the declaration he had made. It was in vain that he assured her, again and again, that he neither did, nor ever should, entertain an affection for any woman excepting herself, and entreated that she would subject him to some test by which the truth of his words might be proved. At length she replied—

“ Well, prince, if you would have me believe that you truly love me, you will not refuse to undertake a task, on the achievement of which my mind is set. Nor far from hence there lies a garden, in which there grow herbs which will cure every disease from which man suffers. Towards the centre of the garden there

rise two fountains. That on the left hand, which is of a pale amber colour, will heal all wounds, will restore sight to the blind, and speech to the dumb. The other, which stands on the right as you enter, is endowed with still more marvellous properties. The waters are of a bright red hue, and if applied to the lips of the dead, will immediately restore them to life. You must fill this basket with the herbs from the enchanted ground, and these two flagons with water from the fountains. I do not disguise from you that the enterprise is fraught with danger ; but you will not heed that, if you truly love me."

"You are right, my beloved," replied Prince Redad. "If you will point out to me the road which leads to this garden, I will hasten without an hour's delay to fulfil your commands."

"The way to it," replied the forester's daughter, "is not difficult to find. You must proceed directly to the north for a short distance after leaving the cottage, when you will see a green lizard striped with gold reposing on the branch of a tree. As soon as it perceives you, it will descend and lead the way to the entrance of a cavern, which is the commencement of a subterranean passage. Here you will find a horse, which you must mount : and he will carry you past the first gate, which is guarded by men in armour. After this you must dismount and proceed on foot ;

for the road lies over a narrow bridge of steel, which crosses a broad river, called the River of Death. The bridge is of vast height and length, having no parapet on either side; and evil genii of frightful form hover round it, uttering the most terrible threats and warnings. But a bold heart and a firm head will carry you safely across it. On the further side lie the enchanted gardens, with the fountains in the midst. But the portal which leads to them is protected by a huge Serpent, which you must encounter and slay. If you return from the garden, bearing the herbs and the water, I shall then be assured you love me, and will become your bride."

The prince, without hesitation, undertook the enterprise, and girding on his sword and armour, departed without a moment's delay. He soon reached the spot where the lizard was stationed, its brilliant colours rendering it conspicuous among the surrounding objects. As soon as it descried his approach it dropped from the branch and glided among the trees, keeping a few yards in advance of him. Presently they reached a rocky precipice, in the side of which appeared a huge arch, closed by massive doors, leading apparently into the bowels of the earth. Before this gloomy portal stood a charger fully caparisoned for the road, except that it had no bridle. At this spot the lizard stopped, and Prince Redad, throwing him-

self into the saddle, the folding gates flew open, and the steed moved onward with him. After a long descent through a passage hewn apparently out of the solid rock, and dimly lighted by crevices from above, Redad came in sight of the sky again, and beheld before him a gate of black marble: on either side of which stood a soldier armed from head to foot in steel, and wielding a drawn sword in his hand. As the prince approached it, the horse began to plunge and rear violently, evidently intending to throw his rider between the armed men guarding the pass, who in a moment would have slain him. As the prince had no bridle by which to direct his motions, it was impossible that he could have escaped this disaster, had he not at the last moment remembered the charm given him by the dwarf, which had stood him in such good stead on the former occasion. Bending forward, he whispered the words in his charger's ear, and in a moment the animal was reduced to the stillness of an equestrian statue. Redad urged him to advance at an easy pace, until he had approached within a few yards of the soldiers. Then, driving the spurs into his flanks, he suddenly pressed him forward. The horse sprang instantly to his utmost speed, and before the guards, who were unprepared for such a manœuvre, could raise their swords to strike, he had passed safely through the portal.

He now dismounted, and drawing his scimitar, advanced to the still more perilous part of his enterprise—the passage of the bridge. As he approached the gateway which led to the ascent, he became sensible of a strange horror, which till now he had never experienced. The wind which blew from the river had an icy chill, that seemed to freeze the life-blood in his veins, and the light which streamed on the pathway—strewn as it was, with the bones of those, who like himself had attempted the enterprise—was of a spectral and ghastly hue. He looked back for a moment before passing under the arch, and saw that his very Shadow, afraid to follow him further, stood beckoning to him to return. Redad paused at the sight, and had almost turned back; but the next moment recovering his courage, he pressed forward and mounted the narrow bridge. It was scarcely more than a foot in width, without the slightest balustrade on either side; while beneath him the black waters boiled and foamed as they hurried onward. But the prince's heart did not fail him. He strode with a firm step along the narrow ridge, paying no heed to the sights and sounds of terror which filled the air around him, and at length reached the opposite shore. There he perceived the Serpent which guarded the pass, lifting its head as it scented his approach, and preparing to leap upon him. He raised his sword to

strike ; but the poisonous breath from its jaws had no sooner reached him, than he felt a deadly faintness, and his arm fell nerveless by his side. The Serpent at the same instant made its spring, and winding its huge coils round his neck and body, would speedily have crushed him into a shapeless mass ; had not the sharp edges of the gorget cut deeply into the monster's folds, as they were tightly compressed round his throat, and inflicted a painful wound. With a sharp hiss the Snake disengaged itself from the prince's body, and writhed wounded and disabled on the grass. Redad staggered forward uninjured by its embrace ; but the breath of the Serpent contained a poison so deadly, that no one could breathe it and live ; and in a few moments he fell lifeless to the ground.

Meanwhile the page Ahmed, who from his retreat in the cave had seen the prince issue forth on his expedition, followed him at a cautious distance until he disappeared in the cavern. Dreading that some evil would befall him, he resolved to follow ; and as the gates still stood wide open awaiting the return of the horse, nothing impeded his entrance. He traversed the subterranean passage with all the speed he could command, until he came in sight of the marble gateway. This too was undefended—for the guards had gone in pursuit of the horse, which had galloped off as soon as Redad dismounted. Supported by his affection

for his master, Ahmed stepped boldly on the bridge, and crossed the perilous pass. The first objects which struck his eye, when he had attained the opposite shore, were the Serpent still rolling in agony on the path, and at a short distance the dead body of the prince. Supposing him to be only in a swoon, the page hurried down to the river side, and dipping one of the flagons, which the prince had dropped, into the water, returned as quickly as he could. But in his haste he stumbled over the coils of the Snake, and some of the water was spilt upon it. In a moment it stretched itself stiff and dead. Struck with this phenomenon, Ahmed placed the flagon on the ground ; and taking up the other, which lay close to Prince Redad's side, he filled it from the nearest fountain, the waters of which were of a bright red colour. No sooner were the prince's lips moistened with its contents than he opened his eyes, and in a few minutes was sufficiently recovered to rise to his feet. He looked in astonishment at the presence of the page ; but there was no time for explanations. Quickly filling the basket with herbs and fruit, and the flagons with water from the red and amber fountains, they returned with all possible speed the same way by which they had entered. Only the page, unobserved by Redad, carried away some of the black water from the river in a shell, which he had found in the garden.

It was well that he did so; for the armed men having by this time recovered the horse, had returned to their station at the gate. But a few drops of the water scattered in their faces overcame their opposition, and they fell dead at the same instant on either side of the gate-way.

The prince again mounted the reinless horse, and, taking the page behind him on the saddle, rode through the rocky passage. The gates flew open as the horse approached, and together they emerged from the cavern. The prince now demanded from his companion an explanation of his unexpected appearance, warmly thanking him at the same time for his deliverance. Ahmed complied, and detailed all that had occurred—concluding with a renewed entreaty that he would not return to the forester's hut, or hold any more intercourse with his daughter; who had urged him to this enterprise with the intention of sending him to his death. But the prince was still too deeply infatuated by his passion to attach any belief to this warning. The page could only induce him to promise that he would not only present her with the two flagons containing the red and the amber-coloured water, but also with the shell which had been filled from the river of death. Before they reached the cottage however the page took an opportunity of emptying the contents of the shell into another vase;

while he filled the shell itself with spring water, mixed with the black mud of the pathway.

In the meanwhile the forester and his daughter beheld, to their amazement, from the windows of their cottage, the safe return of Prince Redad. The forester was in reality the necromancer, who had been from the first the enemy of Prince Redad ; and his pretended daughter was a witch who was in league with him. They had assumed their present shapes the better to carry out their detestable schemes: and the return of their victim uninjured, filled them with rage and amazement.

"All plotting is in vain," said the necromancer. "We must kill him with our own hands; and that Fate permits us to do, if he still persists in seeking you for his wife. There had better also be no delay. This very night he shall die."

The prince now entered the cottage bearing the basket and the flagons. The disguised witch received him with affected tenderness, and thanked him again and again for his exertions in her service.

"I can no longer refuse," said she, "to become your wife, since you still desire it. But tell me what is the dark liquid which I behold in this shell? I gave you but two flagons. These are filled from the fountains of Health and of Life; but you, it would seem, have brought me a third besides."

"It is even so, my beloved," returned the prince; "the shell contains some water from the River of Death, which flows beneath the bridge of steel. A single drop is instantly fatal to those on whom it falls."

"Say you so!" exclaimed the witch, instantly flinging the contents of the shell into the prince's face. "Then, fool, die in your folly!"

Redad started up; and the forester perceiving that the water had not had the effect expected, rushed upon him with his drawn sword. A short combat ensued, which ended in the victory of the prince; who by a successful stroke pierced his antagonist through the heart. At the same moment Ahmed, rushing from behind the door where he had lain concealed, threw some of the true water of death on the damsel's forehead, and instantly, with a loud scream, she expired. The bodies were restored by death to their proper shape; and the prince perceived that he had been ensnared by two malignant enchanters, who would inevitably have succeeded in their design, but for the aid afforded him by the page Ahmed.

They now returned to the capital of the Hundred Isles, where they were welcomed by the old king with equal surprise and delight; for the prince had long been given over as dead. At the court also he found two embassies. One came from the King of Deryabar,

announcing that, as Prince Redad had not appeared, another alliance had been contracted for the princess. The second was from the king with whom they had lately been at war, complaining that his daughter, the Princess Gulnare, had been carried off by Prince Redad, and demanding her restoration. A few inquiries brought to light the fact, that the princess had assumed the name and dress of the page Ahmed ; under which disguise she had twice rescued him from death. The prince was sensibly affected by the discovery ; and when Gulnare had again assumed the attire befitting her rank and sex, he was no less charmed by her beauty than by her affection. An envoy was sent to the court of her father, relating what had occurred, and soliciting her hand for Prince Redad. A favourable answer was soon returned ; the nuptials were celebrated with much pomp and rejoicing ; and the prince, delivered from the three dangers which had threatened him, lived long, and reigned prosperously.

CHAPTER IV.

"OH, mamma!" exclaimed Ethel; as Mrs. Wood, turning to her writing-table, again took up her pen; "don't leave off. We want to hear another story, just like that one. I am sure your governess must have told you more than one story; now, didn't she, mamma?"

"Well, perhaps she did," said Mrs. Wood, gravely.

"Then do tell us another of them!"

"Yes, mamma," said Willie; "you see, they have not done with their snowball yet. Look, they are making it into a great pyramid, with a statue on the top, and they won't have finished it for another hour to come, I am certain. Do tell us another fairy tale, and then we shan't mind losing the fun out of doors.

"But what is to become of my letter, Willie? It only wants half an hour to post time, and it will take me a quarter of an hour to finish it."

"Oh, mamma, the letter can't signify, you know; not for one day, anyhow. I suppose it is only one

of the regular letters to Aunt Richard, or to one of the tradespeople at Ludlow, or something of the kind. It will do just as well to-morrow ; won't it, mamma ? ”

“ Well, Willie, you shall judge for yourself. The letter is to Uncle Thomas, not Aunt Richard ; and it is an invitation to him to come here on the last day of the year, and bring Philip, and Gerald, and George, and the two younger ones, to pass three weeks with us. You know they were to come the second week in January for a fortnight ; but papa and I settled last night that they would like to take their part in the fun on Twelfth-night ; and so I was to write to Uncle Thomas, and ask the party to come ten days earlier.”

“ Oh, how jolly ! ” said Willie ; “ I shall see George ever so much sooner.”

“ And Fanny and Hubert, too,” exclaimed Ethel. “ They were not to have come, I thought.”

“ And Philip and Gerald are such capital actors,” added Gerty. “ I heard Charlie say, that when they acted the play last year at Uncle Tom's, some of the company said they had never seen two boys act so well as Archie and Philip. It was hard to say which was the better of the two ; and Gerald too was very good. How delighted the Branches will be ! And only think of Uncle Tom too being here ! Why,

they said he made the best stage manager out of London! everything will go off well, if he comes!"

"Well then," resumed Mrs. Wood, "perhaps my letter is of more consequence than you thought. You know it will take two days to reach Uncle Thomas's house; and the party can't very well leave home without having a day's notice. This is the 27th, so that if it does not go to-day, they will not in all likelihood be here by New Year's day. Shall I go on writing the letter, or shall I put it off, as Gertie suggests, and tell you another story?"

"Mamma, how can you ask?" exclaimed Willie "Go on writing it at once, and we will all be as mute as mice till it is done. I wouldn't miss having them for all the stories that ever were told."

Mrs. Wood, accordingly, resumed her pen, and the Underwoods adjourning to the window, employed themselves again in watching the progress of the snow edifice. By this time it had assumed the shape of a pyramid fully six feet high, with a flat top, which, as Archie informed them, was the shape of the Pyramid of Cheops. They were now engaged in designing a full length statue of Cheops himself, which was to be elevated, when complete, on the summit. The framework of this work of art consisted of a huge hay-rake, with a horizontal bar tied at right angles, about a foot from the top. On this, the head, arms,

body and legs of Cheops were moulded. To be sure, the attitude of the Egyptian monarch, with extended arms and wide straddling legs, was not the most dignified ; and the continual tendency of the nose to drop off, somewhat marred the symmetry of his features. But seldom has a statue by Chantrey or Behnes elicited more applause, when unveiled in the presence of an admiring multitude, than did the image of Cheops, when he was at length elevated by the united strength of the company, and safely fixed on the apex of his pyramid. Having firmly established him in his position, the next thing, of course, was to knock him down again ; and a sufficient number of projectiles having been collected, the four workmen (Selina and Ellen not joining in this department of the sport) took up their station about ten yards off and opened their fire. The Underwoods, who from the embayed window of the library could survey all that was passing, were highly diverted at the spectacle ; and the failure or success of the competitors in the contest elicited loud exclamations of derision or approval. For a long time Cheops retained his station in unimpaired integrity, until one of his eyes and his left cheek were struck off by a successful shot of Master Tom's. A few minutes afterwards, his right hand underwent a like mutilation ; then the crown was dashed from his brows by a coal flung by Charlie, and,

finally, the entire figure succumbed to a large turnip, and rolled from its pedestal to the ground—a melancholy type of fallen greatness.

Perceiving that the Branches were about exemplify still further the round of human events by the restoration of their shattered idol, the younger ones turned away from the window: and finding that Mrs. Wood had despatched her letters, and that it still wanted an hour to dinner, they renewed their entreaties for another story.

“Well,” said Mrs. Wood, “I have no objection now, and I do know a story, Ethel—not very like Prince Redad to be sure—but I think you will like a little variety, so I will tell you

THE ENCHANTED RING.

Jack lived with his grandmother in a little cottage at the foot of the Grey Mountains. They were honest, hard working people, but so poor, that they could hardly live from day to day. They had an orchard, and a poultry-yard, and some pigsties; and Jack could play so well on the fiddle, that he was always welcome at the merrymakings in the neighbourhood. But in spite of all these sources of income, nothing thrived with them. Their crops failed, their hens strayed, their pigs died, of all kinds of strange diseases, which

attacked nobody else's pigs ; and though Jack might have got a good deal of money by his fiddling, he was so good-natured, that nobody paid him. They got poorer and poorer and poorer every year ; and their landlord, who was a hard, griping man, became more surly every time he called for his rent ; for they never could pay him more than half his demand, and very seldom even that.

One evening they were sitting over the embers of their fire, wondering how they were to supply their larder or their wood cellar ; both of which were quite empty. Jack, who had laid down his fiddle in despair, suddenly proposed that they should go and beg of their neighbours, some of whom might be able to help them. But his grandmother told him it would be of no use asking them, for they were all as poor as themselves.

"No, granny," said Jack, "they are not all poor. There is Farmer Graspall ; he has plenty of money, they say."

"He is a miser, my child," said the old woman, "and won't even let the villagers glean his fields after harvest. It would be no use asking him."

"Then there is Doctor Gripeall. He lives in a large house, and has plenty of servants."

"He's a doctor, my child, and would give us nothing but physic ; and we shouldn't like that for supper."

"Then there's Counsellor Grindall, granny; he is richer than all of them. I am sure he could spare us something."

"Preserve us, child! he is a lawyer; we should get nothing but law from him, and law is worse than physic or starvation."

"Well, then, granny," said Jack, "there is only one other person that I know of. Suppose we go and beg Redbeard to relieve us."

The old woman screamed, as if Jack had upset the kettle of boiling water over her.

"Redbeard!" she cried; "don't think of going near him whatever you do. He is a dreadful magician, and he is waited upon by giants, who, they say, feed on human flesh. He'll either eat you up alive, or turn you into a dog, or an ape, or something of the kind. Better beg of anybody than of him."

"Well," said Jack, "I may as well be devoured by a magician as by hunger, for all I can see. And if I must be turned into a dog or an ape, at all events I may find a comfortable living. So, granny, I will go up to-morrow morning, and try my luck with him; and, meanwhile, I will play a tune on my fiddle."

The old dame implored and entreated, but she could not succeed in diverting Jack from his purpose. He only played the merrier for her remonstrance; and at last she cried herself to sleep in the chimney corner.

Early the next morning, Jack got up, and having said his prayers, as he always did, left his granny still asleep on the settle, and set out for Redbeard's castle.

The magician lived in a solitary spot among the mountains. It was as bleak and desolate a place, as was to be found anywhere in the whole of that dreary country. Not a tree, nor a flower, nor even a clump of gorse, was to be seen ; nothing but the bare hill-side and huge masses of black stone. Jack felt his heart fail him more and more as he went on ; but he had resolved that he would not turn back, and at last he found himself in front of the castle in which Redbeard lived.

It was scarcely like a castle, though, after all. It was more like a great pile of rocks, which somebody had taken a great deal of trouble to shape into the likeness of one. There was neither door, nor chimney, nor window, that Jack could see—none, at all events, in the front which faced him ; and he found it impossible to go round to the back or sides of the castle, because a wall of rock rose perpendicularly on either side, which was too high for him to climb over. Jack, however, who was a brave lad, determined that as he had come so far, he would not go away without having effected his purpose. He tried to scramble up the front of the castle itself, which was carved into all

manner of strange devices, and by dint of great exertion at length reached the top. But he had scarcely done so, when he trod upon a hole, which had been concealed by grass and shrubs, and fell through into a cavern which lay beneath.

He lay stunned for a long time, for the height from which he had fallen was considerable. It was lucky for him that the floor of the cave was of soft sand, or he would certainly have broken his neck. It was so dark that he could not discern the smallest glimmer; and Jack was so tired with his long walk, and so shaken by the fall, that he was glad to lie quiet. Presently a dim light began to show itself; which gradually grew stronger and stronger, and Jack perceived that it proceeded from several lamps suspended from the roof; which, so far as he could discover, had lighted of their own accord. A brilliant illumination was soon diffused on every side, and Jack saw to his astonishment that he had not fallen, as he had supposed, into a cave, but was lying in an apartment furnished with the utmost splendour. The walls were of black marble, exquisitely polished, and relieved by patterns worked in every variety of colour. The floor, which he had supposed to be of sand, he found to be gold dust, mixed with pearls. The chairs, tables, and sofas, as well as all the rest of the furniture, were of solid gold, and the cushions of rich

tapestry and velvet. Jack had never seen a thousandth part of the riches, which every object around him displayed : and he thought to himself that Red-beard, into whose castle it was plain he had somehow made his way, could hardly refuse to give him a few handfuls of the dust off the floor ; which would be enough to make him and his grandmother rich for life.

But it struck him as very strange, that there appeared to be no door by which the room could be entered. Even the aperture through which he had fallen could not be discerned in the rich pattern of the dome, which was at least fifty feet above his head. After the most careful search he could discover no opening in the walls except a small hole, not so big as the tip of his little finger, just about the level of the floor. Jack had scarcely descried this when the lamps began to flicker, and the chairs and tables to dance about, as though something were coming near them which frightened them very much. Jack was as much alarmed as they appeared to be, and hid himself under a large settee, through the frame-work of which he could peep out. Presently he saw a small round ball, no bigger than a pea, come rolling through the little hole opposite him, and alight in the middle of the floor. It had no sooner settled there, than it began to grow larger and larger. Soon it was as big

as a marble; then it became the size of an apple; then it grew as big as a pumpkin; and then Jack perceived that it was Redbeard himself, who was gradually increasing in size until he had almost reached his natural dimensions. Jack was terrified almost out of his wits at this strange spectacle; and he was still more frightened when Redbeard, having reached his ordinary height, instead of stopping there, as Jack had expected, continued to grow more and more in bulk, until he had become an enormous giant, whose head almost touched the top of the dome. Then he began to empty the pockets of his coat. Out of the right hand pocket he took a great many purses containing gold and silver, as well as jewels of all kinds,—earrings, bracelets, and necklaces—which he put into a large chest, and fastened down with a spring lock. Next he put his hand into his left pocket and drew out two live men—one a fat alderman, with a councillor's wig and cloak, and the other a vintner, with a red cap on his head. The poor men trembled from head to foot, and fell on their knees to implore him to spare their lives. But the cruel magician, drawing his scimitar, struck each of them with the flat side of it, and immediately one of them was changed into a fat goose, smoking hot, and ready to be eaten; and the other into a foaming jug of ale. Redbeard, having reduced himself again to his ordinary

size, sat down and proceeded to make a hearty meal. After this Jack saw him draw a ring from his finger, and place it in a golden casket, which stood on the table, saying as he did so—

“Ring, ring, thou here art laid,
Till once more I need thy aid.”

Then Redbeard rolled himself up in his cloak, and, stretching himself on the softest and largest sofa, soon went to sleep, snoring so loudly that he seemed to shake the very room.

Jack lay awake, for his terror was too great to allow him to move hand or foot throughout the whole night. Besides, hungry as he was, he would sooner have died of famine than touch one morsel of the remains of Redbeard's dinner.

In the morning the magician got up again, took the ring out of the casket, and placed it on his finger, saying at the same time—

“Ring, ring, I humbly pray,
Serve me well throughout this day.”

Then Jack observed, what his alarm prevented him from observing before, that Redbeard kept continually twisting the ring round and round his finger, and that as he did so, he kept diminishing in size every moment, until he became so small that Jack could only just see him, and he was able to roll himself out through the little hole in the wall, by which he had come in

the night before. Soon after his departure the lamps began to fail, and Jack was left in total darkness.

He had eaten nothing for more than a whole day ; but his grief and alarm were so great that he scarcely felt the pangs of hunger. He saw plainly that there was no mode of escape from the chamber. Unless Redbeard should discover him, he must soon die of famine ; while, on the other hand, if he did fall into the magician's clutches, he would be certainly eaten up alive. This dreadful alternative made him so miserable that he lay all day thinking about it, until towards the evening, as before, the lamps began to burn, the room to shake, and the little ball rolled in.

Redbeard produced from his pockets a larger booty than that of the day before, only instead of an alderman and a vintner, he now drew forth two beautiful maidens and a Jew, the former of whom he changed by a touch of his scimitar into a couple of boiled chickens, and the latter into a knuckle of ham. Having finished his repast, the enchanter placed the ring in the casket, saying, as before—

“ Ring, ring, thou here art laid
Till again I need thine aid.”

After which he again laid himself down to sleep, snoring as loudly as ever.

Jack, who between famine and fright was now rendered desperate, crept out of his corner, stole

silently up to the sofa where Redbeard was lying, and catching up the scimitar, with a single blow cut off his head.

"That serves you right," he said, "for your cruelty to the poor maidens. Now, how am I to make my escape from this place?"

He sat down and pondered for a long time, without being able to hit on any mode of exit. But hunger and peril are great sharpeners of the wits, and it occurred to him that the ring might help him to take his departure from the chamber, as he had seen it help Redbeard. He opened the casket and tried to take it out, but it remained immovable; until at last he remembered the rhyme which he had heard the magician use, and said like him—

"Ring, ring, I humbly pray,
Serve me well throughout this day."

Upon which the ring was immediately released from the casket. Placing it on one of his fingers, he began turning it round and round, and soon perceived that he was gradually growing smaller and smaller, until he had become no larger than a pin's head, and was thus enabled to roll himself out by the small hole, at which he had seen Redbeard disappear. He soon found himself on the other side of the rocks, close to a small crack, through which he perceived that he had made his escape. Turning the ring the reverse

way, he speedily brought himself again to his natural size; and hurrying with all speed down the same path by which he ascended the mountains, he arrived in the course of an hour or two at his grandmother's cottage.

The old woman was too much rejoiced at the sight to scold him for the fright which he had given her. She placed before him a large pie, which she said one of her charitable neighbours had sent her that morning, though she had had no heart to partake of it. Jack had no such objection; but sitting down at the table, did his best to make up for his two days' abstinence.

He had hardly finished, when there came a loud knocking at the cottage door. His grandmother jumped up in a great fright; and Jack himself was a little bit alarmed; for he was afraid it might be Red-beard himself, who had come to life again in some wonderful manner. So he peeped through the cottage door before opening it, and saw that it was not Red-beard indeed, but the landlord, who was looking very cross and angry.

"Now, dame," he said, as soon as he had crossed the threshold, "I hope you have got your rent ready this time. You know this is the third time I have called to ask for it; and I have made up my mind, that if you don't pay me to-day, I will sell up all your goods."

"Pray don't, sir," said the old woman ; "we have been more unfortunate than ever this autumn. Our best cherry-tree did not bear ; and the boys stole our pears ; and the pigs died of the measles."

"You have always the same story," said the landlord, angrily. "How much money have you got towards the rent, I should like to know? If you haven't got the whole, I suppose you have at least got a part of it."

"We haven't been able to save anything this quarter, sir," said the old dame, humbly ; "but if you will only give us a little more time, we will be sure——"

"I'll not give you another day," exclaimed the landlord, more crossly than before ; "I shall take an inventory of all your goods immediately, and have them sold to-morrow ; and after that, you and your grandson will turn out of the cottage."

"Oh, but please, sir," sobbed she, "if you turn us out, where are we to go, and what will become of us?"

"That's your affair, not mine," said the landlord ; and taking his notebook from his pocket, he began to make an inventory of the widow's goods.

Now Jack had sat all this time before the fire, thinking whether a tune on his fiddle would do any good, or whether he could say anything that would

soften the landlord's anger, or hit upon any mode of raising the money for the rent.

He had a trick of twiddling his fingers when he was in a brown study, and as he ruminated now, he twisted the ring, whose existence he had altogether forgotten, round and round upon his finger. He did not notice that as he did this, he kept growing larger and larger every moment, until his head almost touched the ceiling of the cottage. His grandmother, who had thrown her apron over her head, and was sobbing bitterly in the opposite corner, could not see him. But when the landlord, who had finished his inventory, turned round to leave the house, he saw, to his extreme surprise and terror, an enormous giant, who would be at least twenty feet high, if he stood up, seated on a stool by the fireside. He had never been so frightened in all his life. He dropped his pencil and pocket-book, and took to his heels, leaving his coat and hat behind him; nor did he pause for a moment till he had reached his own home. Jack laughed heartily when he perceived what had happened, and turning the ring the reverse way, brought himself to the right size again before his grandmother had discovered that the landlord was gone.

"I mustn't make such a mistake again," thought he, "or I shall terrify my neighbours out of their senses."

So taking the ring off his finger, he put it carefully away in his pocket.

After this matters went more smoothly with Jack and his grandmother. As the landlord never ventured near the house again to ask for his money, they lived rent free for the remainder of the old woman's life. At last she died. Jack buried her as decently as his means would allow, and getting together the little money he possessed, and taking his fiddle under his arm, went out into the world to seek his fortune.

He wandered about for a long time, over a great many countries, but he could not find anybody that would take him for a servant.

"What can you do?" said they.

"I can dig, and mow, and keep pigs, and play on the fiddle," said Jack.

"Dig and mow?" asked one. "Do you belong to this part of the country?"

"No," said Jack; "I come from a country that lies about a hundred miles off."

"Oh, then it is of no use your applying here. No one here employs people to mow and dig, who don't belong to this country."

"Play on the fiddle?" inquired another. "Do you come from beyond the seas?"

"No," said Jack; "I come from a country a long way from here, but it is on this side of the sea."

"Oh, then, it is of no use for you to stay here. We never listen to any musicians, except those who come from beyond the seas."

It was the same everywhere. Some thought he was too tall ; some too short. Some declared that he seemed stupid ; others thought that he was too clever, and would certainly take them in. Some did not like his looks ; while others vowed that he was too handsome, and that their daughters would infallibly fall in love with him.

At last he came to a spacious and populous city, where the people all seemed to be in great trouble, as though some great misfortune had befallen them. Jack accosted the first group of citizens whom he encountered with his usual inquiry, "If they could tell him where he could find employment?"

"What can you do?" inquired they as usual.

"I can dig and mow, and keep pigs, and play on the fiddle," returned Jack.

"Play on the fiddle!" repeated one of the elders of the group. "Do you think you can play well enough to cure a man of his melancholy? If so, your fortune is made."

Jack considered awhile ; but remembering that he had often cheered his old grandmother's low spirits by his fiddle, replied boldly that he thought he could.

"Go to the king's palace, then ; and they will im-

mediately give you an audience with the king or his chamberlain."

Jack found all the guards and the servants in mourning, and the courtiers looking as gloomy as if a reduction of their salaries had been proposed.

"What is the matter?" inquired Jack. "Whom are you in mourning for?"

"We are in mourning for the king's son," said the chamberlain, who looked twice as lugubrious as any of the others.

"Ah," said Jack, "that's sad; when did he die?"

"He is not dead at all," said the chamberlain, turning up his eyes; "but he is so gloomy and melancholy, that it is worse than if he was. For six months past he has never been seen to smile; and for the last fortnight he has not spoken a word to any one, not even to his father or his mother. The court physicians are at their wits' end about him, and say now that nothing but music will do him any good. I suppose by your violin there, that you are a musician."

"Yes," said Jack, "that is my trade."

"Well then, to-night you shall see what you can do. A great many musicians have tried their skill, but all without success. However, the right man, I suppose, will come at last; and perhaps you may be he. Come

this evening at sunset, and you will be admitted to his apartments."

Jack went away, and walked about the town, making a great many inquiries of the citizens. He found that the prince, who had been remarkable all his life for his gay temper and affable demeanour, had suddenly become as austere and morose as any hermit. He always went about clothed in black, would attend none of the court balls, and had shut himself up in a massive tower, which stood at one corner of the royal palace. From sunset to sunrise he locked himself in his apartment, to which he would admit no one; and the musicians, who by the king's command endeavoured to dissipate his melancholy, were only admitted to the ante-chamber. No one knew how he passed the night; but in the morning he always appeared to his attendants more sad and gloomy than when he retired to rest. Every musician was allowed three nights' trial. If on the third morning he had not succeeded in curing the prince, he was ignominiously put to death. But if the prince should be restored by his means to his right mind, then any reward was to be granted him which he might choose to ask.

Jack returned to the palace at the time appointed; and soon afterwards the prince was seen crossing the court-yard, wrapped in a long black cloak, with his eyes fixed upon the ground. Jack and the chamber-

lain followed him to the door of his bedchamber ; which he closed in their faces, and locked behind him, drawing also two heavy bolts across it.

"Now," said the chamberlain, "take your seat here, and try your skill. In the morning we shall see what you have done for him."

As soon as he was gone, Jack took his fiddle and played a great many of his liveliest tunes. He was curious to know whether the prince was listening, and tried to look through the keyhole ; but the key was in the lock, and he could see nothing. So he took his violin again, and after playing a few more airs he fiddled himself to sleep.

In the morning the chamberlain returned with the royal attendants. But when the door opened, the prince came forth with as sombre an aspect as ever.

"You have done him no more good than the others," said the chamberlain. "I advise you to leave the court without delay, as you will now be allowed to do without inquiry. If you claim a second trial, it will be granted you ; but if you fail then you will be publicly bastinadoed in the market-place ; and if you fail a third time, you will be hung, drawn, and quartered, without benefit of clergy."

Jack went away ; and straying into a wood at a little distance, sat down to think.

"I wish I knew what he was doing in his bed-

chamber," thought he. "Perhaps there are double doors to the room, and the walls are so thick he can't hear me. Perhaps he goes to sleep the moment he enters it, and my music is altogether lost upon him."

He fell into a brown study as he pondered thus, and as usual began to twiddle his fingers. As he did so, he twisted the ring, whose existence he had almost forgotten, round and round—becoming smaller and smaller at every turn. At last he noticed this phenomenon. "I have it," he exclaimed, leaping up; "I shall find out at all events how the prince passes the night, and will take my chance of being whipped to-morrow."

At sunset he presented himself as before at the palace, and accompanied the chamberlain, who shook his head solemnly when he saw him, to the prince's ante-chamber. As soon as he was left alone, he played a few tunes upon his violin; and then turning his ring, made himself so small that he was able to creep under the door into the adjoining room. Here he found that the prince had retired to bed, and was to all appearance asleep; but the lamp was still burning on the table.

Jack lay quietly in the corner watching him. Presently the great clock of the palace struck twelve. Immediately the prince got out of bed, and resumed his clothes. He then went to the window which looked

out on a private garden, and opening the lattice, he said in a low voice—

“Horse, horse of magic power,
Carry me hence to my lady’s bower.”

Immediately a rushing noise was heard, like that of a great bird flapping its pinions, and a horse with four large wings and a golden saddle on his back flew into the room. Jack had only just time to creep into the prince’s boot before the latter sprang into his seat, and the steed immediately flew away.

They proceeded for some time with such rapidity as almost to take Jack’s breath away. At length they approached a thick wood; and the horse alighted in front of an iron gateway, guarded by two huge lions, each of them as big as an elephant. Here they found several other youths in the same mourning garments as those worn by the prince, who were vainly endeavouring to press through the gate. But the moment that any of them approached the lions, they roared with such terrible fury that their very breath drove the adventurers back, stupified with the shock. After this had lasted for several hours, the dawn began to break. With the first ray of light the iron gates shut to with a sound like thunder; and the youths each of them mounting a winged horse like that which had carried the prince, flew off in different directions.

As soon as the prince arrived at his own chamber,



The Winged Horse.—p. 126.

he dismissed his steed, and, taking off his clothes, again lay down on his bed; while Jack, creeping under the door, again resumed his proper size, and awaited the return of the chamberlain. When the latter arrived, together with the prince's attendants, and found that their master's malady was in no degree improved, they carried Jack before the king, and reported what had taken place. The king ordered him to receive twelve stripes in the market-place, as all his predecessors had done who had ventured on a second trial.

Jack bore the punishment bravely; and when it was over, the chamberlain bade him good-bye with a sarcastic smile, telling him that he did not suppose he should have the pleasure of welcoming him again. But to his great surprise, when the evening came, Jack presented himself as before with his violin in his hand, stating that he wished to be allowed a third attempt.

"You had better not," said the chamberlain; "hanging is worse than flogging, though that is bad enough, as I should think you must know."

"Never mind," said Jack, "I will take my chance of that. And, after all, a man may be flogged many times, but he can only be hanged once."

"That's true," said the chamberlain, and left him alone in the ante-room.

No sooner was he gone, than Jack crept under the door into the prince's apartment ; but, instead of lying still as before, he stole close to the pillow, and said in a low voice, "My prince, are you awake?"

The prince sprang up in great surprise and looked round the room, but it appeared to be quite empty.

"Lie down again," said Jack, "and listen to me. I am a friend who has come to help you. I will enable you to pass the iron gates and the great lions, if you will only confide to me what it is you wish to obtain by doing so."

"O great genie," said the prince (for he made sure he was speaking to some powerful spirit). "In a prison within the wood, which is guarded by those lions, the most beautiful princess whom the world has ever seen, is unjustly confined. She is bound to a pillar by seven rings of steel, and the key which will unlock them hangs in the centre of the dome, more than a hundred feet from the ground. The prison walls are of polished steel, and the only way to the summit is by a winding staircase of glass, so smooth that no one can tread on it without falling. They say that many princes, who have succeeded in passing the gate, have been killed in their attempts to mount this staircase ; but if I could once make my way thither, I would gladly risk my life in the attempt."

"How do you know that she is so beautiful?" asked Jack, who was of a cautious turn of mind.

"She appeared to me in a vision," said the prince, "and told me her history—imploing me to come to her assistance. She it is who sends the winged horse every night, in the hope that I shall effect her deliverance. Her loveliness so greatly transcends that of all other women, that I cannot rest day nor night till I obtain her for my wife."

While they conversed thus, midnight arrived; and the prince, rising as before, summoned his winged steed.

"I will accompany you," said Jack; only this time, instead of creeping into the prince's boot, he stationed himself on the brim of his cap.

As soon as they had reached the wood, Jack directed his companion to dismount, and tie his scarf over his eyes. Then he turned the ring on his finger, until he had made himself a giant as tall as a pine-tree; and taking up the prince, placed him in his pocket. This done, he advanced with great strides towards the gate, which gave way before his feet, as though it had been made of paper. The two lions leaped up, and would have attacked him; but he caught them up by their tails, and, whirling them round, threw them nearly a mile off into the forest. He then continued his course until he came to a second gate, higher and

stronger than the first ; in front of which stood four dragons larger than the lions, and vomiting fire and smoke. As soon as they saw Jack approach, they unfurled their wings and rose into the air, hovering round him, and endeavouring, all four, to assail him at the same moment. But he tore up a large tree by the roots, and with four successive blows laid them dead on the ground beside him. He went on until he came in sight of the third and last gate, which was still more massive than the two former, and was garrisoned by seven giants, each of them as tall as Jack, and armed with clubs of steel. But Jack, when he saw them, gave his ring a few more turns, and soon he and his weapon had grown to a size so much exceeding the defenders of the gate ; that they all took to their heels when they saw him come near, and left the way unguarded.

This last obstacle passed, he came in front of the tower in which the princess was confined. It was built, as the prince had said, of polished steel, and was more than a hundred feet high ; but the entrance to it was so low and narrow, that the smallest dwarf could not have crept through it.

Jack now reversed the ring, making himself as small once more as an ant ; and in this manner he entered the chamber, with the prince still in his pocket. The first thing he perceived was an alabaster pillar in the centre of the room, to which the princess was bound

by seven rings of steel—two encompassing her ankles, two her wrists, and two her shoulders, while the seventh was fastened round her ivory neck. She was so beautiful that Jack fell over head and ears in love with her on the spot ; but he remembered that he had given his promise to the prince to help him to make her his bride, and he never broke his promises. Restoring himself to his proper dimensions therefore, he took the youth from his pocket, and then removed the bandage from his eyes.

The prince no sooner beheld the princess, than he fell on his knee before her, kissing her white hand, and entreating to be allowed to attempt her deliverance.

"There is no way of doing that," sighed the princess, "except climbing the crystal staircase ; and, alas ! that is so perilous, that eleven noble youths have lost their lives in essaying it."

"Let me aid you in the attempt," said Jack.

The princess cast her eyes upon him as he said this, and secretly hoped he might be the one to succeed ; for Jack was now standing before her in his own proper shape, and was the handsomer man of the two.

The prince would not accept Jack's offer. Notwithstanding the services which the latter had rendered him, he was afraid that he intended to rival him in the princess's favour,—which was very ungrateful, you must allow. He began hastily ascending the stair-

case, which was made of glass smoother than ice, and had no balustrade. Seven times did the staircase wind round the walls: and the prince had safely accomplished six of the windings, when, his foot slipping as he commenced the seventh ascent, he fell to the ground, and was crushed to death on the marble pavement.

"Alas, alas!" sobbed the princess, "that is the twelfth prince who has perished in the attempt to deliver me; and here I shall remain a prisoner till the hundred years of my enchantment have expired."

"Do not fear, sweet lady," said Jack; "if you will accept me as your champion, I will soon effect your release."

"No, do not essay it," said the princess, "the danger is too great. I could not bear to be the cause of your death."

"Never mind that," said Jack; "but will you be sure to marry me if I do deliver you?" for, as has before been said, Jack was a cautious youth.

"Oh, you need not doubt that," said the princess, blushing—"my destiny would oblige me to marry the person who released me. Besides, to say the truth, I like your appearance very much."

"Thanks, beautiful lady," said Jack; "now let me bind this scarf round your eyes, for you must not look on me while I ascend the staircase."

Then Jack laid himself down on the lowest step, and turning his ring, kept continually lengthening himself out like a great snake. At every turn of the ring his body surmounted another step, while his feet remained resting on the floor below. At last his head touched the very top of the dome, and reaching out his hand he grasped the golden key. Next, he as carefully reversed the process, moving down the staircase in the same manner as that in which he had ascended it ; and presently he stood, key in hand, before the alabaster pillar.

The locks gave way one by one with a crash like thunder, until he came to the seventh. No sooner did the key turn in that, than the tower, the gate, and the enchanted grove itself, vanished into air. Jack found himself in the hall of a magnificent palace, holding the princess by the hand ; and the next day he was married to her with great rejoicings, and declared the heir of her father's kingdom.

As Mrs. Wood concluded, the sound of the gong came rolling through the house, announcing that it wanted half an hour to dinner ; and at the same moment the Branches burst into the room, their cheeks all aglow with excitement and exercise, proclaiming

with great delight that Charlie's uncle, old Parchment, had arrived unexpectedly at Balderscourt.

"How in the world he got here through the snow, I can't think," said Tom ; "they say the carriage has been three hours on the way. But anyhow he is here, Joseph says, and Charlie has gone up to his bedroom to see him. There will be no want of fun now, at all events. Parchment will tell you stories (and some of them jolly ones too) as long as a fellow can listen to him, and longer too !"

CHAPTER V.

MR. Marchmont (or Parchment, as the saucy youngsters at Balderscourt thought fit to parody his name) was a little dried-up man; who lived in a curious old house, situated a mile or two from the gates of Squire Wood's park. He was a gentleman of good birth, and his family, though not wealthy, had long been settled in the county. He had lost both his parents when he was quite a boy; himself and his younger brother William being thereupon left wholly to the care of an eccentric bachelor uncle, who lived in a remote part of the country, and kept no company but his books. Whether it was in the main the influence of his relative's example, or his own natural bias, that determined his career, it is hard to say. But he took to study, as readily as a duckling takes to water, even during the days which most boys dedicate to marbles and mischief. His uncle, delighted with the congeniality of his disposition, to which that of his brother William exhibited a remarkable contrast, undertook the whole of his education himself, sending him neither to school nor to college. Thus,

when at his relative's death, Giles Marchmont came to reside on his own estate, it was found that he knew almost every subject that could be started in conversation, but nothing of the world, and very few of its inhabitants. He was however kindly and sociable—a frequent, and always a welcome guest at Balderscourt; which circumstance was the cause of the nearer connection with the Squire's family to which reference has already been made.

The younger brother, William Marchmont, had soon rebelled against the dreary monotony of his uncle's mansion, and was, at his own request, consigned to Eton and Oxford, whence in due course of time he migrated to chambers in Lincoln's Inn. In the course of one of his numerous visits to his brother's ever-open mansion, he saw and fell in love with Miss Wood, the Squire's youngest sister. The marriage was long delayed, for William Marchmont's rise in his profession was infinitesimally slow, and he was too proud to be dependent on the fortune of his wife. At last, when it plainly appeared that to wait for an income from the exercise of his legal abilities was to await the arrival of the Greek Kalends, William yielded to his brother's generous solicitations, and accepted the liberal income, which he had more than once urged upon him. The marriage was duly celebrated; but it did not long continue. William

Marchmont died ten years before the date of our story, at the early age of forty ; leaving one son about six years old at the time of his death. Mrs. Marchmont, as the reader has already been told, accepted a home at Balderscourt for herself and her boy. The latter was bred up with his cousins, and had become in affection so completely one of the Squire's own children, that many acquaintances of the family believed him in reality to be so. He was a fine hearty lad ; a general favourite with all who knew him, but more particularly with his uncle Giles : who rarely allowed many days to elapse, after his nephew's return from school, without coming to pass a few days at the Hall, and make sure by personal observation that he was thriving.

On these occasions he was always joyfully welcomed by the inmates of Balderscourt—not merely as a neighbour and connection, but because he was a perfect encyclopædia of information ; which he would dispense with the utmost simplicity and good-humour to any one who sought it of him. Without the least ostentation he would solve knotty problems in theology of Mr. Hartopp's setting : clear up dark passages in history for Dr. Bowles : or explain a difficult allusion in some Italian poem for Miss Fane. Anon he would set the Squire right about some point of law, on which country justices are not always in-

fallible ; and then turning from these grave topics with equal facility to lighter ones, would tell the boys legends and fairy tales, which he had gathered from all sources—Oriental, Scandinavian, or German ; as inexhaustible apparently as the Princess Scheherazade herself.

On the present occasion his presence was hailed by the juveniles with more than common satisfaction. They had succeeded in obtaining the MS. of the Spanish play from the Squire just before dinner, and a hasty glance at it had convinced them that it would be a great success, if it should be properly performed, but that it would not be a very easy thing to perform it properly. In particular there was no description given in it of the costumes to be worn by the various actors ; nor was there any one within reach who could supply them with this ; for Uncle Hartopp's knowledge of Spain was very slight, and did not belong to the date of the play, the events of which were supposed to have occurred early in the seventeenth century. They were therefore at a standstill (if the reader will pardon the Hibernicism) before they had even set out on their journey ; and the advent of Mr. Marchmont, who was safe to be able to give any information for which he might be asked, was greeted with general delight.

Scarcely had the cloth been removed, and the

Squire had delivered himself of the two solemn toasts of "Church and State" and "No Popery," without which he would have had neither digestion nor repose, than the newly arrived guest was beset by a multitude of interrogatories.

"Please, Mr. Marchmont, how would a Spanish gentleman at the beginning of the seventeenth century be dressed?"

"Mr. Marchmont, do the judges and barristers in Spain wear wigs and gowns?—at least, did they wear them about the year 1610?"

"Uncle Giles, what is the costume of a monk of the Carmelite Order? and what is the difference between a white friar and a black one?"

"Is a Spanish villa like an English one to look at? and could you draw a sketch of one for us to paint a scene from?"

"What do the Spanish vine-dressers carry in their hands—forks or knives or only baskets? and are their hats flat or conical?"

"You may see the costume of the Spanish gentry of that date in the pictures of Velasquez, Archie," answered Mr. Marchmont, without the smallest hesitation. "He lived early in the seventeenth century. The dress of that day was very grave and sober. It was not till the time of Philip V. that the Spaniards took to gay colours. No one wore wigs in those

days, Tom. That hideous head-dress did not come into vogue till nearly the middle of the seventeenth century. The Carmelites, Charlie, are all of them white friars, and used to wear a white dress, until it was altered by Pope Honorius IV. They now wear the usual sad-coloured robe, with a scapulary of a brown colour, and linsey woolsey skirts. The Spanish ladies, Miss Selina, have for many generations worn a kind of veil called a mantilla on their heads ; very becoming it is said to be. You may see a sketch of a Spanish gentleman's house in the great Velasquez in the breakfast-room, Archie. As for the implements of the vine-dressers, I don't know what they would want with knives, or forks either. They pick the grapes with their fingers, and trample them out with their bare feet."

"But how should we dress them on the stage?" asked Charlie. "We are going to introduce them into a play, and don't know what their costume should be."

"Dress the men," said Mr. Marchmont, "in broad-brimmed hats, white or coloured shirts, with the sleeves puckered ; bragas—that is, loose drawers similarly puffed ; and aspergatas, or sandals of hemp ; each and all liberally bedecked with variegated ribbons. Dress the women with the kind of head-dress called the *panuelo*, tight bodices, and stockings of red or blue."

"That will look very jolly—won't it?" said Tom; as Archie jotted down some hasty memoranda of the miscellaneous information thus plentifully poured forth.

"Is there anything else you would like to know?" inquired Mr. Hartopp, quietly.

"Oh, yes!" returned Tom, wholly unaware of his uncle's irony. "We want Mr. Marchmont to tell us where we can get a hymn for the Spanish vine-dressers to sing. It is only put in the stage directions of the second scene that they sing a hymn, but no hymn is given."

"Very reasonable indeed!" observed Mr. Hartopp; "what next?"

"Oh, nothing more," answered Tom; "except that we want Mr. Marchmont to tell us some stories."

"Nothing can be more moderate than your demands, Tom. Well, Marchmont, I suppose you have no objection?"

"None whatever," said Mr. Marchmont, placidly. "As for the hymn, I think Miss Fane can supply you with that. I heard her playing a very beautiful and suitable Spanish air some time ago, and she has put some words to it, I believe."

Miss Fane coloured a little at the suggestion; but a little of Charlie Marchmont's persuasion induced her to promise, that she would not only let them have the words and air, but would officiate as the music mistress

on the occasion ; though she grew rather alarmed when she found that "the peasants" were to comprehend the whole of the Underwoods, and some of their cousins into the bargain.

"And you will help us to make up the dresses after Mr. Marchmont's direction ; won't you, mamma ?" asked Selina. "And you, too, Aunt Marchmont, and Cousin Julia ? We shall have such a deal to do, what with curtains, and dresses, and caps, that we shall never get it all done, unless every one helps."

Very well, my dear," said Mrs. Wood, with a sigh of resignation ; "I believe it will be the least trouble to do so. If the house must be turned upside down for the next fortnight, I had better take the direction of the *bouleversement* into my own hands."

"When are the saturnalia to begin ?" inquired Uncle Henry.

"Oh, to-morrow, I have no doubt," returned Mrs. Wood. "Why do you ask ?"

Mr. Hartopp did not reply. Turning to Tom, he resumed.

"Well now, Tom, you have nothing more to ask Mr. Marchmont, except to tell you some stories ?"

"Ah, to be sure," returned the youth addressed ; "please do, Mr. Marchmont. You would like it, would you not ?" he continued, turning to the others.

A general shout expressed the popular assent.

"Very well," said Mr. Marchmont; "what will you have, boys? an old English fairy tale, or an Eastern, or a German? Or would you prefer a mediæval legend, or a Persian allegory, or a Chinese fable?"

"A fairy tale! a fairy tale!" was the universal cry.

"German or Eastern, I don't care which," said Selina.

"German, I vote," said Archie.

"German be it then," said Mr. Marchmont, and forthwith began the tale of

THE THREE TALISMANS.

At the court of the Great Emperor, there was an old nobleman, who although he had long held a post among the royal ministers, was not, like most of his associates in office, a wealthy man. He lived in a large house, which had descended to him from his ancestors; but it was shabbily and scantily furnished: nor was his dress nearly as rich as that of the other courtiers. He had an only son, whose name was Konrad, a youth who had just attained his majority when his father's death left him an orphan.

As soon as the funeral was over, the will was

opened, by which it was found that everything was left to Konrad ; except a legacy to Gretchen, the old housekeeper, and two others to Ludwig and Bengel, retainers who had long been in the service of the family. Enclosed in the will was a sealed paper : which Konrad was directed to open in his private chamber, when no one but himself should be present. The young man, who had felt all his life the insufficiency of his means to support his rank, seized with eagerness on the precious paper ; making no doubt that it contained some important secret which would raise him to opulence and power. He hastened at once to the chamber indicated in his father's will, and after securing the door, broke the seal of the enclosure, and read as follows :—

“ In the secret drawer of my ebony cabinet, which is opened by a spring concealed in the seventh knob from the bottom, you will find an Eyeglass, a Purse, and a Sword. They are powerful talismans given to my father by a magician, to whom he had rendered a valuable service. He received them under a promise that he would at his death reveal their existence to me ; and would also bind me, in my turn, to hand the secret on to my son, when I too should depart from the earth. You however are not bound by any obligation respecting them, and may destroy them if you will. Appended to each of the three talismans will be found

a parchment describing its powers and uses. But I cannot forbear from adding, out of affection to you, that both my father and myself, after a very short experience of these gifts, finally laid them aside. My last advice to you is, never to make use of them at all."

Konrad laid down the paper in great perplexity. He knew that his father had been a shrewd, though not a very successful man; and he could not help admitting to himself, that his advice on the subject was likely to be sound. But his curiosity was very strongly excited; and he reflected, that at all events there would be no harm in his seeing the articles which the drawer contained, and learning their several uses. This would not in any way prevent him from following his father's advice, if he should resolve on doing so. Accordingly he proceeded at once to examine the cabinet. With some difficulty he discovered the spring concealed by the knob; and on pressing it, a long narrow drawer flew open, in which lay the Eyeglass, the Purse, and the Sword. He took out the first of them. It was a plain, rather old-fashioned article, secured by a silver chain of antique workmanship. On the parchment annexed to it was written—"Whosoever you use this eyeglass, the person with whom you are conversing will tell you the exact truth, though he will not be aware that he is doing so."

Having carefully examined the eyeglass, Konrad next took up the purse. This was like the other, of ordinary workmanship, and belonged to the fashion of some fifty years before. Attached to it was this description—"This purse will be full of money, whensoever the article which you want to purchase is really needed by you."

Having laid this also down, Konrad lastly took up the sword. It was much handsomer in appearance than either the eyeglass or the purse. The hilt was richly mounted in silver, and the scabbard curiously carved, and inlaid with jewels. Secured to the hilt was a strip of parchment, containing the words—"Whensoever you use this sword in a just quarrel, you will conquer."

Konrad replaced the sword in the drawer, and broke into an exclamation of extreme surprise at the advice which his father had given him.

"By the help of these talismans," he exclaimed, "I shall become one of the greatest, the wealthiest, and most powerful men in the world. All my schemes will succeed: because no one will be able to deceive me on any subject, whenever I use the eyeglass; or withhold any information I may desire to possess. The purse, again, will furnish me with an inexhaustible supply of money, so that I may satisfy all my wants without the necessity of daily drudgery.

And what danger need I fear from men's jealousy or hate, while I am girded with a sword which will render me invincible? It must be that my father made but a very hasty trial of these gifts, or he could not possibly have advised me to forbear from employing them."

He sat down, and began to reckon up the things of which he stood in immediate need, and which he resolved he would purchase without delay. He was to be presented at court, by his late father's desire, and solicit some post from the Emperor on the next reception day. He must go there in mourning, of course; but his dress ought to be rich and splendid, as those of the other young nobles—more so, indeed, for did not the possession of this purse make him in reality the wealthiest man in the land? His doublet and hose ought to be slashed with silver, and secured by clasps of jewels; and his cap looped with diamonds, like that of the son of the Grand Chamberlain. Nor ought he to walk on foot, as he had hitherto done; but to go to court, like the wealthier nobles, in a coach drawn by six horses, with the harness richly mounted with silver, and attended by equerries and running footmen. Of course also his house ought to be furnished in a style corresponding with his equipage; or rather his present house was altogether unsuitable for a person of his wealth and importance. A larger and handsomer

mansion would be required, with suites of apartments, in which proper entertainments might be given, and which should be surrounded by fine gardens. His fancy wandered away into all kinds of expenditure, which his newly acquired wealth would render necessary; and he was at length startled from his reverie, by perceiving that the morning had now quite passed, and the time for taking some refreshment had arrived.

He replaced the drawer in the cabinet, and closed the spring; having first, however, hung the eyeglass round his neck. He then summoned his attendant, and desired that Gretchen, his housekeeper, might be sent to him.

"Gretchen," he said, as soon as she had arrived, "I am hungry. What is there you can get me to eat?"

"I am sorry to say, my lord, that the larder and cellar are both quite empty," replied Gretchen.

"How!" exclaimed Konrad, in surprise. "Where then is the game, that the Grand Equerry sent as a present but a few days ago?"

"It was so high as to be unfit to eat," replied the housekeeper, "and we were obliged to throw it away."

"And the venison, which the Emperor's huntsman brought us from his majesty last Monday?"

"It has been stolen from the larder, my lord, while the servants were absent at the funeral."

"And the boar's head," continued Konrad—"the boar's head which I purchased myself the day before yesterday?"

"The undertaker and his men ate up every morsel of it, before I knew that they had presumed to touch it."

Konrad was much disquieted at these disasters, for he had but a scanty supply of money wherewith to replenish his larder. He thought also that Gretchen appeared somewhat disturbed. He lifted his eyeglass to examine her face more closely, as he said, "Are you sure that the whole of the boar's head has been eaten by the undertaker's men?"

"The undertaker's men have never touched the boar's head at all," rejoined the housekeeper, in the same tone as before. "Ludwig, the butler, and I, had it for supper last night, and again for breakfast this morning; and very good it was. There will be enough for two meals more, I expect, if not three."

Konrad was extremely astonished at this reply, and was about to break into some exclamation; when he suddenly remembered the magic properties of the eyeglass, and resolved to pursue the inquiry.

"And the venison, and the game?" he said aloud.

"The venison, my lord, was eaten at a great supper which the servants gave two nights ago; and

the game was sold to the poulterer, and he gave a very good price for it."

"And the wine, Gretchen? I think I heard you say that the cellar also was empty."

"There are some few dozens left," replied Gretchen; "but not more than Ludwig says he shall want for his own drinking."

Konrad looked hard at the speaker; but she did not exhibit the slightest discomposure. She was evidently not in the least aware of what she had been saying.

"Pleasant to hear this," muttered he to himself. "What serpents have we been nourishing in our bosoms! The old rogue, by-the-by, is for ever complaining of her poverty. I should like to know the truth of that too. Gretchen," he added aloud, "you are getting old, and you will some day, I suppose, be retiring from service. What should you have to depend upon, if you were to leave me now?"

"My lord," replied Gretchen, in the same tone as before, "I have amassed a very comfortable little property in your father's service. What with bribes from your lordship's servants, and presents from your lordship's tradesmen, and perquisites of one kind or another, I have got money enough together to buy an estate, if I needed one."

Konrad's anger broke forth at this.

"You old cheat," he exclaimed, dropping his glass, "I will pay you your wages, and you shall leave my service to-day!" and before she could express her astonishment, he opened the door and called for the butler. "Rascal," said he, "go and fetch the remains of the boar's head, of which you and Gretchen partook last night and this morning, and a flask of the wine which you meant to reserve for your own drinking. Do you mean to deny that you have it downstairs?" he added, looking at the butler through the eyeglass.

"Oh no, my lord," said the butler, "there is about half the boar's head left, and six dozen and a half of the wine; only I can't think how in the world you came to know anything about it!"

The butler and housekeeper left the room; and Konrad, taking the purse out of the cabinet and following them to the dining hall, immediately paid both of them their wages from it. "Thank goodness," he exclaimed, "I have got rid of two such rogues," and sat down with a good appetite to the boar's head. As soon as he had finished his repast, he summoned his valet, for he wished to go out. "Bengel," said he, "bring me my black velvet cloak and cap—you know which I mean, though I have not worn them this twelvemonth. Also a pair of my best lace ruffles. I wish to walk abroad."

"Your lordship forgets that the cloak and cap were

lost a long time ago at the court masquerade which your lordship attended. And the ruffles are quite worn into holes, so as to be unfit for your lordship to put on."

"Ah," said Konrad, looking at him through the eyeglass, "is there not a single pair left fit to wear, and are you sure the cloak and cap are lost?"

"I am wearing the ruffles myself, my lord," replied the valet; "and am going to appear in them at a grand party at the Vintner's to-night. The cloak and the cap I changed away for a new jerkin and hose more than six months ago. I thought you had forgotten all about them."

"You are as great a rogue as the others," said Konrad; and taking out his purse he paid him also his wages, and desired him to go about his business. He then took out and girded on the Sword, put on an old cloak and hat, and went out into the town to make his purchases.

"It is a pity," thought he, "that my father kept the eyeglass in his cabinet, or he would not have been cheated so terribly all his life."

He went first to the most fashionable tailor in the town. "Klinker," said he, "I want a court suit of the finest quality—black velvet and silver, looped and buckled with jewels, and a hat like that of the Grand Chamberlain's eldest son."

"Certainly, my lord," said the tailor. "I presume your lordship will supply us with the silver lace and the jewels, which are articles we do not furnish."

"Of course," replied Konrad, rather stiffly. "I will see that they are sent in the course of the afternoon. Is this velvet of the finest quality?" he added, as the tailor brought out a piece for his inspection."

"Oh no, my lord," replied the tailor, as Konrad raised his eyeglass to examine it more closely. "It is the remnant of an old piece which we have had a long time in stock, and could not venture to sell to any of our best customers. But as I don't expect you will ever be able to pay for it, it will do well enough for you!"

Konrad turned sharp upon him. "How dare you attempt to pass off old and damaged goods as new ones!" he exclaimed. "Bring me a different article altogether, and I will pay for it on the spot."

The tailor obeyed, more astonished than abashed, and soon appeared with another piece of a very different appearance.

"That is really of a fine quality, is it?" inquired Konrad, examining it as he had done the last.

"Yes, my lord," said Klinker, "that is our best, and I shall take care you pay us for it too. I suppose your father must have been saving some money, and you are going to run through it as fast as you can!"

The young man was now becoming so used to these speeches that he only smiled, and bidding the tailor good morning, left the shop. He then proceeded to an office where servants attended to be hired, and stated that he was in want of a housekeeper, a butler, half a dozen footmen and pages, as well as coachmen, equerries, and grooms. The keeper of the office, who was well acquainted with the young nobleman's family and circumstances, was extremely surprised at the statement. But the sight of Konrad's purse, which appeared to be full of gold, reassured him, and he promised to send the persons he desired, to confer with him respecting their wages and other necessary particulars that evening.

He next paid a visit to the principal jeweller, to whom he purchased a plain mourning ring, which he paid for out of his inexhaustible purse; and the sight of its contents made such an impression on this tradesman also, that he willingly supplied him with all the necessaries of his court suit, which he directed to be sent to Klinker's shop.

After this he inquired for the best coachmaker and horse dealer in that neighbourhood. Of the former he ordered a carriage of the newest construction and most costly materials, and directed that harness for six horses should be provided, splendidly mounted in silver, and bearing his crest. To these orders the coach-

builder listened with an obsequious smile ; but Konrad discovered, by the help of his eyeglass, that he intended to make some very careful inquiries before he sent home the costly articles which had been ordered.

The last place which he visited was the yard of the horse-dealer. The latter, on hearing that Konrad required no less than six horses for his carriage, as well as several more for himself and his equerries, expressed his great satisfaction that he was able just then to suit him admirably. A wealthy merchant had lately died, and his whole stud of horses was to be disposed of. There were six white horses, all of them young and serviceable, and perfectly broken in. There were also several saddle horses, handsome and useful animals—such as could only be met with by an unusual piece of good luck. And the price for which they were to be sold was extraordinarily small. Only six hundred pounds for the six carriage horses ; and sums ranging from eighty to a hundred and fifty pounds a-piece for the saddle horses. They had cost their late owner at least twice the money.

Konrad interrupted the dealer's volubility by desiring that the carriage horses might be led out for his inspection.

"They are all of them sound, are they?" inquired he, as he inspected them through his eyeglass—"all of them sound and quiet, are they not?"

"Two of the six are sound," said the dealer; "but one of the two is vicious, and nearly bit a man's ear off the other day. That one over there is a little touched in his wind; but you would not find it out for some time. The one which the groom is leading by the pump yonder is very weak in his knees; and the two others are so old that they will soon be unfit for work. I would not give a couple of hundred pound for the whole lot, if I had the buying of them, instead of the selling."

"Ah," said Konrad, "now let us see the saddle horses. What is your opinion of these, Herr Meyer?"

"The bay there is a good article. We ask a hundred and fifty, but we should be glad to take a hundred and twenty, which is ten pound more than he is worth. The grey is also a fair article, and worth perhaps eighty, though we put him at a hundred. The rest are good for nothing."

"Thank you," returned Konrad. "There are two of your horses that I am ready to buy—the bay and the iron grey. The others I must decline." And leaving the horse dealer somewhat abashed, but with a much higher opinion of his customer's judgment than he ordinarily entertained, Konrad quitted the yard.

It was late in the evening before he had completed his purchases; and as he was returning homewards he took the nearest cut, which lay through a narrow

lane. It was seldom frequented by the citizens even by day, but at that hour of the night it was entirely deserted. He had proceeded but a little way down it, when a loud scream at some distance attracted his attention. He ran hastily up, and found that it proceeded from a young girl simply dressed, but of great beauty, who was struggling to free herself from the grasp of a youth, whose rich attire showed that he belonged to the highest rank of the nobility. As he turned angrily on Konrad, who shouted to him to desist, the moon came forth from behind a cloud and revealed the features of the Grand Chamberlain's son, Count Waldeck, who was well known not only as the most dissipated among the nobles of the Emperor's court, but as the most deadly and successful duellist of the day. He was slightly acquainted with Konrad, whose slender means seldom allowed him to mix with the wealthier members of the aristocracy, and who was known to be a very indifferent swordsman. The young count therefore thought he might easily overcome any opposition he could offer, and called to him in a haughty tone to proceed on his way without meddling with what in no way concerned him, or he should pay the penalty of his interference. As he spoke he laid his hand on the hilt of his sword, and Konrad at the same moment drawing his weapon, they were soon engaged in a hand-to-hand combat. The count had expected to obtain

an easy victory ; but to his surprise and discomfiture, they had not exchanged half-a-dozen passes, when he was run through the left shoulder by his antagonist.

In the meanwhile the damsel, who had made her escape at the commencement of the fray, was seen in the distance, returning with some of the citizens whom she had summoned ; and Konrad, satisfied that his antagonist would be properly looked after, proceeded on his way. Before he had reached the end of the lane he heard the footsteps of some one pursuing him ; and, turning round, perceived that it was the maiden whom he had rescued.

"Gallant stranger," she said, "I must not suffer you to depart without rendering you my thanks for the service you have done me. May I presume to ask your name? My father may possess the means, though I do not, of rewarding——"

"I need no other reward than that of having served you," returned Konrad, perceiving for the first time that the unknown, though plainly attired, was exceedingly beautiful, and had the air of high refinement. "But if you would repay me as you desire, give me the ring that I see on your finger, and accept this in its place."

The maiden blushed crimson as she heard the request, but complied without demur. She drew the *ring* from her finger, and suffered him to replace it

with his own. Then she tripped lightly away, and Konrad pursued his way homewards.

"What was my father dreaming of!" was his reflection, as he re-entered the courtyard of his mansion.

He was not, however, so agreeably impressed by the scene which awaited him on his entrance. The whole household was in confusion; a number of new servants were waiting to be hired in one apartment; but in another were assembled all his old retainers, demanding their immediate dismissal. The report given by the butler, the housekeeper, and the valet, had so alarmed them, that they had resolved that they would no longer stay in the service of a master, who must have employed spies to track out all the private doings of his principal domestics—quite sensible that if the same course were to be pursued with them, they would soon be dismissed as the others had been. Konrad was somewhat disturbed; but his purse enabled him to pay all their demands, and the house was soon cleared of them. By the help of the eyeglass, however, he soon discovered that he had a set of rogues to deal with in the new candidates for office, quite as great as those had been whom he had just dismissed. He was obliged at last to select those who appeared to be the least disposed to abuse their new situations; and retired to rest, with the determination of seeking out others on the morrow more worthy of his confidence.

The next day was the one on which he was to be presented at the court of the Emperor. Early in the morning arrived the court suit which he had ordered, and which, when tried on, was found to fit him admirably. Soon afterwards he was informed that the coach and horses, as well as the harness and liveries, awaited his inspection, and that a great crowd was assembled in the street outside, admiring their splendour. Konrad stepped out on the balcony, and was delighted with the magnificence of their appearance, and with the shouts of the people. But soon afterwards his satisfaction was somewhat diminished by the entrance of his newly-engaged valet; who informed him, with much apparent reluctance, that the tradespeople were all assembled in his ante-room, and requested that their bills might be discharged immediately, as the cost of the articles ordered was too great to allow them to grant credit. Burning with indignation, Konrad seized his purse, and hurried downstairs, resolved not only to discharge his debts immediately, but to inform them also that his custom would for the future be withdrawn from them. Full of this idea he entered the room, and addressing Klinker, desired him to produce his bill, and at the same time drew out the magic purse. But to his dismay, no less than to his astonishment, the pockets, which, when he had last beheld them, had been crammed

to the top with gold, were now entirely empty! He rubbed his eyes, and carefully examined the purse, to make sure that he had not taken a wrong one by accident. But no! there was no mistaking the talisman, which had hitherto stood him in such good stead. All of a moment it flashed upon him, that it was only *when the articles were really wanted*, that the purse would be full of money. The tradesmen, who had noticed his blank look when he made this discovery, began to whisper apart to one another; and Konrad, greatly incensed at one or two observations which fell from them, hurried out of the room to examine his own coffers; of which, since the discovery of the gifts, he had made but small account. Alas! there were but a few gold pieces; not enough, he felt sure, to discharge even the smallest of the bills awaiting him below. He was obliged to return to the apartment where he had left his creditors, and make the best excuse in his power for being unable to pay them at that moment; promising, however, to discharge their accounts within a few days. But the tradesmen with one voice refused to grant the credit for which he asked; and after a few insolent remarks, left the house, carrying with them the rich clothes and jewels, which had attracted so much admiration. At the same time the coach and six, with all the brilliant train of outriders and lackeys in their splendid

liveries, drove off amid the derisive shouts of the populace. Nor was this the worst ; for all the newly-hired servants quitted the mansion along with them ; leaving Konrad literally without a single retainer to attend upon him.

But the hour for his presentation at court had now arrived, and there was no time to waste in lamentations. If he should fail to be present after an audience had been accorded him by the Emperor, such a breach of etiquette would never be pardoned. He was obliged, therefore, to put on as quickly as he could the best suit which his wardrobe contained—a sad contrast, it must be admitted, to Herr Klinker's masterpiece—and hurry on foot to the palace.

The old nobleman, who had undertaken to present him, had been a long time waiting for him, and was not in the best of humours. He was also much disturbed at the sight of Konrad's shabby attire. But he was much too bland and smooth to show his inward feeling.

"We are a little late, my lord, I fear," he said ; "but doubtless the clocks are wrong. And your—your retinue—your dress ! I ask a thousand pardons—I am blundering sadly."

"You mean that my dress scarce befits my rank, my lord ?" returned Konrad, haughtily, as he contemplated his shabby suit through his eyeglass.

"No, no, my dear young man," replied the courtier,

"not in the least. I was only thinking that it is as much as my credit is worth to present such a scarecrow to his Imperial Majesty ; and if I could only find a decent excuse, I would get out of doing it even now."

Konrad coloured, and dropped his eyeglass, for at that moment his name, and that of his patron, was called by the Grand Chamberlain ; and the old courtier, smiling and bowing under the impression that he had been making the civilest of speeches, conducted the young nobleman to the foot of the throne.

"Hem !" said the Emperor ; "you are the son, we believe, of the Baron Steinfort, for whom we had a profound regard, and who was for many years our valuable servant. But we do not know, and——"

As his Imperial Highness spoke thus, he paused, while his eye noticed, evidently with no favourable impression, the slovenly dress and appearance of the youth before him. "Is he so poor ?" he said, apart, to the Grand Chamberlain.

"It is scarcely that," replied the Grand Chamberlain, contemplating Konrad with a malevolent eye, for he had learned that it was from his hand his son had received a dangerous wound a few hours before ; "it is scarcely that. His father never appeared at your Majesty's court in such guise as this. I have heard that this youth is debauched and spendthrift. Doubtless that is the cause of his mean appearance."

“Ha!” said the Emperor, turning coldly to Konrad, “we wish you good morning, young sir, and will no longer detain you. Let the Count of Graefenheim now be summoned. We have considered his petition, and are resolved to restore him to our favour.”

Konrad turned away, disappointed and angry at a reception so different from what he had expected, and endeavoured to hide himself among a crowd of youthful nobles. But by these he was not well received. Partly the shabbiness of his dress, and partly the haughtiness of his manner (for his pride had been greatly roused), caused them to avoid him. And besides this, a version of his encounter with the young Count Waldeck, which greatly misrepresented the facts of the case, had been circulated by the Grand Chamberlain, and operated much to his disfavour. He several times addressed himself to persons with whom he had some acquaintance; but their cold and short replies soon caused him to break off the conversation. His irritation increased with each successive failure, and he burned for an opportunity of repaying their insolence, as he had done that of Waldeck the evening before. More than once his hand stole instinctively to the hilt of his weapon, and nothing but the presence of the Emperor prevented him from bursting out into an open defiance. Among the throng of courtiers he noticed one in par-

ticular, who seemed to regard him with especial dislike; though he had not as yet addressed a word to him. This was the young Count Bibereck, a cousin, and, as he afterwards learned, an intimate friend of the Grand Chamberlain's son. Vexed beyond endurance, Konrad at length stepped up to this youth, and regarding him scornfully through his eyeglass, asked him "whether there was aught in his appearance to cause him displeasure?"

Von Bibereck answered, in a tone which was sufficiently courteous to suit the place and occasion, but in words which were a strange contrast to it, "that his appearance caused him the greatest disgust and annoyance; and that it would give him the most extreme satisfaction to have an opportunity afforded him of chastising his cowardice and insolence."

"Ha! say you so, my lord?" exclaimed Konrad, angrily. "Follow me into the garden, and you shall have at once the opportunity you desire."

The young count started in great surprise, for he was in no way aware that his thoughts had been spoken aloud; but he instantly complied with Konrad's invitation, and followed him to a private spot in the gardens. After a few more words had been exchanged, both parties drew their swords, and a furious conflict commenced.

Meanwhile, the rumour of the quarrel spread

through the presence-chamber, and reached the ears of the Grand Chamberlain. Calling together a troop of the royal guards, he proceeded immediately in pursuit of the offenders, and arrived at the spot where they were tilting, just as Konrad had fallen to the ground, pierced through the arm by the sword of Von Bibereck. The latter, perceiving the approach of the soldiers, made his escape before they could arrest him. But Konrad was seized, and after his wound had been bound up, he was once more conducted by the Grand Chamberlain with malicious satisfaction into the presence of the Emperor.

"Ah," groaned he, as he was borne along, "I ought to have remembered that my sword would only avail me where my quarrel was just."

He was now arraigned before the Emperor, and it was clearly proved by the by-standers that the quarrel had been provoked, and the challenge given, by Konrad. Moreover, the Grand Chamberlain now laid a complaint before his Imperial Highness that his son had been attacked by the prisoner without the least provocation, and almost killed, on the evening before. He was, in consequence, condemned to suffer the consequences of his misconduct.

The penalty for brawling within the precincts of the court was a very severe one. The offender's right *hand* was usually struck off, all his goods were con-

fiscated, and himself banished for ever from the court. Konrad's youth and his father's long services were allowed to plead so far in his favour, that the first part of this terrible sentence was remitted ; but the remainder was rigorously enforced ; and Konrad that evening quitted his native city—an outcast and a wanderer, having nothing left of his former possessions but the three ill-omened gifts, of which the royal officers had not thought it worth while to deprive him.

He wandered for a long time from one city to another, undergoing all manner of hardships and privations—scarcely able at times to supply himself with the bare means of supporting life. At last he reached a forest at the very extremity of the Emperor's dominions, and about nightfall one evening, found himself in front of a magnificent castle, surrounded by beautiful and spacious gardens. Unwilling as he was to present himself in the houses of men of noble birth, from whom he could expect nothing but neglect or derision, he was yet compelled to solicit the boon of a night's lodging, as no other house appeared anywhere in sight. He therefore wound his horn before the gate, and desired the servant to bear in his name and title to the owner of the mansion. A few minutes afterwards, to his great surprise, the seneschal of the castle came forth, attended by a retinue of domestics : and greeting him with the utmost distinction, welcomed

him to the palace of the Count of Graefenheim. They conducted him with much ceremony to a splendid chamber, where a change of apparel suited to his rank awaited him. As soon as his toilet was completed, he was ushered to the banqueting-room ; where, as the chamberlain informed him, the count and his daughter awaited his presence at supper. Astonished and somewhat confounded at this unlooked-for reception, Konrad advanced to the dais ; but the moment his eye rested upon the figures of his host and hostess, the mystery was explained. He recognized in the latter, the beautiful maiden whom he had rescued from the violence of Count Waldeck, and whose ring he still wore upon his finger : nor did he fail to notice that she had not parted with the one which he had given her in exchange.

“Young sir,” said the count, “for the last few weeks I have sought you everywhere without success. I know that your troubles have been caused by your brave rescue of my daughter ; who, with myself, was lodging in disguise in the capital, seeking a reconciliation with the Emperor, whom my father had offended. He has now restored us to our ancient possessions, and I trust you will consent to accept here a home, in the place of the one which on our account you have forfeited.”

Konrad, it will be readily believed, had no objection

to offer to an invitation so heartily urged, seconded, as it was, by a glance from the bright eyes of his lovely hostess. In a few months his nuptials with the latter were publicly celebrated. Immediately after this latter event, he shut himself up in his private room : made the largest fire which his grate would contain ; broke the magic sword into a hundred fragments, and consigned it, together with the eyeglass and purse, to the flames.

“ I cannot be thankful enough,” exclaimed he, as he saw the last fragments turn to dust, “ that the magician who required my father to transmit these talismans to me, did not oblige me in my turn to hand them on to my children ! ”

CHAPTER VI.

"WELL," said Tom, as Mr. Marchmont concluded, "of all the flats I ever heard of in my life, I never heard of such a flat as that Konrad! To think of a fellow burning a magic purse, sword, and eye-glass! That beats anything I ever was told in my life!"

"You don't see the moral, Thomas," said Dr. Bowles.

"Yes I do," said Tom. "He used them wrongly, and therefore he came to grief; but if he had made a wise use of them, why there is nothing he might not have done with them."

"Yes, that is true, Tom," observed Charlie; "if he had only asked things of people, which it would be a good thing for him to know, it would have saved him no end of trouble. Only fancy if I could just go and ask old Watkins the meaning of a stiff bit in the 'Agamemnon;' or get out of Squareroot the answer to some awful equation, without having the bother of working it out, wouldn't it be jolly, just?"

"I should like the sword," said Richard; "I should take care to fight only when I was in the right, and then I should never be licked."

"Well," said Archie, "I think that would be rather cowardly—fighting a fellow only when you know you are quite certain to thrash him. But the purse would have been the jolly thing! You would always be safe to pay for anything you really wanted by means of it. And you might keep your own money for what you *didn't* want."

"Bravo, boys," said Mr. Hartopp, approvingly; "and bravissimo, Archie; I hope you are satisfied, Marchmont, with their comprehension of your teaching."

"They could not exemplify its point more forcibly at all events," returned Mr. Marchmont, smiling. "But come, Dr. Bowles, I am anxious to hear one of your legends of the De Worde family. Charlie has been giving me such a flaming account of one which you read out to him last night, that my curiosity is quite stimulated."

Mr. Marchmont's suggestion was backed by the entreaties of the others, and Dr. Bowles was prevailed on to commence the Tale of

THE YORKIST NOBLE.

I suppose it will be best to take up the history of the De Wordes where we left it—that is, with the escape of Reginald from the hands of his enemies. He succeeded in time to the family honours, and was,

little privation to him, therefore, to pass his days in hunting, and his nights on a bed of leaves and dried heath, with his deer-hounds stretched by his side. It often comforted his father, when he had learned from some chance traveller that the Lancastrian party was still dominant in England, to observe that his son, at least, did not regret their change of fortunes, but enjoyed life as heartily as ever he had done in the plenitude of their prosperity.

After nearly a twelvemonth had passed in this manner, a vague rumour reached the baron's ears that King Edward had succeeded in effecting a landing somewhere in the north of the kingdom, and was on his way to encounter the forces of Queen Margaret. It was necessary that he should ascertain the truth of these reports. Leaving William, therefore, alone in the hut—with a strict charge not to wander from it, unless for some special reason, for more than a short distance—the baron departed early one morning, assuring his son that he would return in a few days at furthest. The boy, left alone in the hut, chafed over an inactivity so unwelcome to his habits. He amused himself first with his dogs, whose rough gambols whiled away an hour or so. Then he collected some dry wood for a fire on which to broil the meat for his dinner. When this had been done, he sat down to *repair some arrows, the feathers of which had become*

damaged. While yawning over this last employment, he fancied he could hear, though at a great distance, the blast of a bugle. He started up and listened intently; and again he heard it—more distinctly this time, though it was irregularly winded. It was not his father's signal; and perhaps the latter's injunction ought to prevent his attempting to discover by whom it had been blown. But he reflected that it might be the call of some person in peril or distress. Slinging his quiver on his back, and thrusting his hunting-knife into his girdle, he caught up his bow and hurried off in the direction of the sound. He had not gone many hundred yards when he heard the same bugle again—nearer at hand, but very faint and low. Again he hastened forward, and in a few moments came in sight of the persons of whom he was in search. Stretched on the ground at a little distance was a man, attired apparently as a huntsman. But this could not certainly be perceived; for several wolves were clustered round him, tearing and devouring his mangled body.

Perched among the high roots of an oak, was another figure, to all appearance that of a lad about his own age, who was defending himself as well as he could against the attack of half a dozen more of the fierce animals which were endeavouring to spring upon him. The height however at which he stood enabled him





The Fight with Wolves.—p. 176.

by the exertion of great dexterity to keep them at bay. Springing on the branches of a tree close at hand, De Worde instantly strung his bow and discharged arrow after arrow, until several of the pack had been slain or disabled, and the few who had been left uninjured took to flight.

De Worde descended from the tree, and drawing his hunting-knife, speedily despatched such of the wolves as were not already dead. He then advanced to the assistance of the youth, who still retained his stand on the root of the oak, too much exhausted apparently to come down from it.

He hastened however to thank his benefactor; though it was evident from his address that he supposed him to be the son of one of the foresters.

"Good youth," he said; "I thank you for your aid. A few minutes later, and, by our Lady, I should not have needed help of any kind again."

"True, sir!" returned William, scanning with curious eyes his companion, whose dress and ~~at~~ were evidently those of a person of distinction. ~~He~~ well I heard your bugle. I marvel that ~~the~~ ferocious brutes should have been found so far from their usual haunts at this season of the year. Some hunting party among the Welsh mountains must have driven them hither. But you are wounded, and perhaps far from home. Our hut lies scarce a quarter



The Fight with Wolves.—p. 176.





The Fight with Wolves.—p. 176.



of a mile distant. Will you please come thither, and est there while your hurt is cared for?"

"The wound is nothing," said the stranger; "but I feel that I have lost some blood; and, as you say, I am at a distance from home. I will therefore avail myself of the help you proffer. Beshrew me!" he added, as he rose, and descended from the tree; "it was a narrow escape. They were blood-thirsty beasts indeed! Had they been Yorkist assassins they could scarcely have sought my life more fiercely! Yonder brindled savage might be Edward of March, or the butcher Gloucester himself, for ferocity!"

William de Worde heard this speech with great displeasure.

"The Yorkists are no assassins, Sir Stranger," he said; "nor will I brook to hear the name of King Edward, or of his royal brother, so traduced."

His companion turned a wondering look upon him.

"And who are you?" he exclaimed, "whose words and manner suit so little with your garb? Your blood should be noble, methinks, to justify such speech as yours."

"My blood is noble," returned William, haughtily, forgetting in his anger the dictates of prudence. "I am William de Worde—a name not unknown, I trow, in the rolls of English chivalry."

"The son of the Yorkist, Geoffrey de Worde?" exclaimed the other, hastily. "The minion of Edward of March——"

"Ha! dare you speak so of my father?" shouted William, his eyes sparkling with anger. "You shall render me satisfaction for this insult. But I had forgotten you were wounded," he continued a moment afterwards, as the other, faint from loss of blood, staggered back on perceiving William's advance. "Suffer me first to tend your hurts, and we will speak of this hereafter."

Half leading, half supporting his companion, William de Worde at length reached his hut; and it was well that they had delayed no longer, as the unknown was now quite exhausted. He was compelled to lie down to rest on William's bed; nor did he sufficiently recover his strength to quit the hut until early the following morning. Even then he seemed in no hurry to depart; and after an hour of seemingly deep reflection, he at length addressed his companion in a different strain to that which he had yet adopted.

"William de Worde, you come of a race that has ever been willing to help the unfortunate, and your own trouble may render you the more willing to do so now. In any case, I know that you are incapable of betraying those who confide in you. I am in

great danger. I have had the misfortune to kill, though in fair fight, the son of a powerful neighbour, who has resolved to have my life in revenge for the wrong I have unwittingly done him. His emissaries are already on my track. Unless I can within a few days reach the sea-coast of Pembrokeshire, where a boat is waiting to convey me to Ireland, my life will inevitably be forfeited. The spot is nearly a hundred miles distant; and I have lost the trusty follower, who would have been at once my guide and comrade by the way. Weak as I am from my wound, I cannot attempt the journey alone. Will you, in knightly courtesy and Christian charity, render me your aid?"

William de Worde pondered awhile before replying. He was strongly interested by his companion's tale; and his compassion was roused by the extremity of his danger. True, his father had forbidden him to wander to any distance from the hut; but he reflected, that had the former been aware of the peculiar circumstances in which he was now placed, he would, he felt assured, have withdrawn the prohibition. After a short pause, therefore, he answered his companion, that he was willing to comply with his request.

Supplying themselves accordingly with as much food as they could conveniently carry, they set out without loss of time, travelling with all possible

secrecy through the wilder parts of Glamorganshire, and skirting the coast of Caermarthen Bay ; until, after many hair-breadth escapes, they came in sight of the castle of Tenby. Here the unknown appeared to observe even greater caution than before. They concealed themselves during the day in a cave among the rocks ; and at night the youth went out alone, having first borrowed William's mantle in which to enwrap himself. He returned in about two hours, with the tidings that the boat would put into the cove, which lay close at hand, about midnight to fetch him—adding, however, that he had been seen by some men-at-arms, who, he had reason to believe, were in pursuit of him, and it was with great difficulty that he had evaded discovery. During the whole of the evening, therefore, they remained concealed in the cavern. Fortunately for them the night was moonless ; and ere midnight it became so dark, that it was impossible to distinguish any objects which were not close at hand.

It was about one o'clock in the morning, when the two youths, who were keeping watch with intense eagerness, saw a light for a moment exhibited on the beach and then extinguished. Grasping De Worde's hand, his companion disappeared noiselessly into the darkness ; and a few minutes afterwards the cave was filled with armed men ; who seizing on De Worde, bound his hands, and

conveyed him instantly to the castle. William made neither remonstrance nor enquiry. He was anxious to allow his comrade time to escape, and was aware that his captors would discover their mistake as soon as daylight enabled them to distinguish his features. But a great surprise awaited him. He had no sooner entered the castle, than he was conveyed to a chamber where several gentlemen of rank were assembled. The first person on whom his eye rested, as he entered, was his father, Geoffrey de Worde; who had now resumed his attire as a noble, and appeared to be in command of the party.

"How is this?" he exclaimed, in great surprise, as their glances met, "William, my son? Whither have you been wandering? The messengers whom I sent to fetch you, rejoined me yesterday with the tidings that they found the hut empty; nor could a trace of you be discovered."

"I was compelled to leave it by an encounter with some wolves," replied William, evasively, "and have since been wandering through the Welsh passes, in my endeavour to reach this place."

"Ah! you have heard then of the glorious fields of Barnet and Tewkesbury, which have caused our white rose to put forth her leaves again. But how came you to know that King Edward had dispatched me on this *special service* to the castle of Tenby?"

"We will speak of that anon," returned William, "when we are in private."

"Nay, it signifies not," said the baron, "since you are here in safety. But it is well that my orders were to seize, and not to slay, the fugitive, of whom they've been in pursuit all day, and for whom, it appears, they have mistaken you."

"Ah! indeed, was it so?" inquired William, with some curiosity. "And for whom, I pray you, did they so mistake me?"

The baron hesitated a moment.

"Perhaps it were better not to tell," he said, at length. "It would in no way advantage you to know. But come, my son, you will need rest and refreshment; and when you are restored, there will be much that will deeply interest you to hear. Strange, that no rumour should have reached us in that wild corner of England, of the great deeds with which the whole land was ringing—of the death of the traitor Warwick, and the young rebel Edward, and of the restoration of King Edward to his lawful throne. We stand high in his favour as ever, William. His is a princely and noble heart, which is ever faithful to his friends."

De Worde and his followers continued to linger for nearly a month on the sea-coast of Pembroke—on the look out, it was conjectured, for some of the Lancastrian barons, who had escaped from the field of

Tewkesbury, and were supposed to have concealed themselves somewhere in the southern parts of Wales. But at the expiration of that time, orders arrived to recall the baron to London, where Edward had again established his court in all its former splendour. De Worde was, as he had reported, high in that sovereign's favour. A post of distinction was granted to him about the court; and his son, who a few years afterwards was knighted by the king's own hands, partook of his father's prosperity.

Six or seven years passed away, during which the throne of Edward appeared to be peaceably established. Sir William de Worde had not forgotten the youth whose flight he had so strangely aided; but he had never obtained any explanation of that mystery; and in process of time his curiosity had almost ceased. It chanced however that in the year 1477 an embassy was despatched by the English king to the court of Burgundy, for the purpose of proposing a marriage between the young duchess and the king's brother-in-law, Lord Rivers. The ship in which William was a passenger, became separated from the others during the night—by some mischance, it was asserted; but, as was believed by many of the party, in consequence of secret instructions. The crew were landed on the coast of Brittany, where they were immediately arrested or rather *despatched* in a species of honourable captivity to

Vannes, where the Duke of Brittany then held his court, in order to obtain his permission to pursue their route. The duke received them hospitably, and detained them several days, during which they were sumptuously lodged and feasted.

One night it chanced that Sir William de Worde was returning late to his lodging (which was situated on the outskirts of the town) when the clash of arms at some little distance, together with cries for help, struck on his ear. Drawing his sword he hurried up, and saw by the light of the moon a masked cavalier defending himself desperately against three assailants, also masked, and evidently disguised. One of these the solitary champion had disabled ; but the other two were pressing on him so keenly, that it was evident his resistance could not be long protracted. De Worde shouted to them to forbear, and one of them instantly turned upon him. A short but sharp conflict ensued, in which William received a wound on the cheek ; requiting his antagonist, however, with a thrust which stretched him dead on the ground. Meanwhile the cavalier had succeeded in his encounter also, running his opponent through the body. The third man, who had been wounded before William's arrival, had now risen, and attempted to escape ; but the stranger rushing upon him, passed *his sword* through him without the smallest hesitation,

laying him also lifeless on the field. He now stepped forward to thank his unexpected ally. At the same moment his mask, which had been loosened by the exertion of the conflict, fell off; and De Worde discerned in the full light of the moon the features of the youth, whom he had assisted to escape from the Welsh coast some seven years before. It was plain that the recognition was mutual.

"Noble De Worde," said the stranger, "a second time I owe you my life. I knew of your presence in Vannes, and would fain have visited you to express my thankfulness, but that I dared not. A hard necessity compels me to shun the notice of even my friends. But believe me, we shall meet yet a third time, when such necessity will exist no more. Meanwhile I pray you to make no mention of what has to-night occurred; nor any enquiries as to who he is whom you have twice delivered from death."

So saying he resumed the mask which he had raised from the ground, and with a courteous salutation to De Worde, walked rapidly away.

A few days afterwards De Worde and his companions received permission to depart. Accordingly with as many of the men-at-arms as could be found (for several, it was evident, had deserted) they rejoined the English embassy; which, after a very brief visit to the court of the duchess, was now returning to England.

Sir William de Worde observed with scrupulous fidelity the injunction which had been laid upon him, to make no inquiries which might tend to elucidate the late mystery. It was evident that the unknown must have deceived him, when he had declared on a former occasion that he was about to seek refuge in Ireland. Probably the whole tale which he had then related to him, was fictitious ; but that did not, in his opinion, release him from the honourable obligation imposed on him. Doubtless the unknown was one of the many Lancastrian exiles, who after the defeat at Tewkesbury had sought a refuge in France ; and it would be unknighly, he felt, to seek to dispel a mystery which might be necessary to the stranger's safety. Accordingly he returned to England, and resumed his post at King Edward's court, which he retained until the death of that monarch.

His father, it should have been mentioned, had not long survived the restoration of the House of York : and Sir William had now inherited the family estates, and the office at court which had been bestowed on his father. But he did not also inherit the warm regard which the latter had felt for the king. Towards the close of his life the character of Edward greatly deteriorated. The faults of indolence and licentious luxury, which had always been his most conspicuous failings, gained now so completely the mastery over

him, as to extinguish the more generous qualities, which had hitherto, in some degree, balanced them. Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who now by the death of Clarence was the heir of the House of York, failing the issue of Edward himself, began to attract to himself the regard of all the abler spirits of the age. Few princes have been more differently represented—more unscrupulously maligned, or defended—than the Duke of Gloucester. But without touching upon these disputed points, it is certain that he was a person who could conciliate the affections and command the enthusiastic loyalty, of men whose bravery and honour were beyond dispute. Sir William de Worde was one of those, whom he sought most eagerly to attach to his service, and whose devotion he was most successful in winning. When, after the death of Edward V., the duke was proclaimed king by the title of Richard III., Sir William was one of his most staunch supporters. Nor did he waver in his loyalty throughout the long and complicated struggle, which terminated at last on the Field of Bosworth. Overtures were made more than once by the chiefs of the Lancastrian party; and the most brilliant promises of advancement held out to him, if he would quit the service of the usurper; who, he was assured, was on the brink of ruin. But De Worde not only rejected these offers

visited with extreme penalties. But, as the reader is aware, Sir William de Worde was one of this number; and the temper displayed by Henry, even since his victory at Bosworth, was such as to encourage the belief that no mercy would be shown to him. It was therefore with a full expectation that he would be ordered for immediate execution, that De Worde entered the apartment in which the King and his counsellors were assembled; and the report which met him at the threshold, that Catesby was even then on the point of being led out to be beheaded, confirmed his expectation. But he was a brave man, and had too often faced death to be unnerved by its immediate prospect. With a firm and equal step he passed up the hall and confronted the assembly, who were gathered at its further end.

“William de Worde,” said the Earl of Pembroke, who as the King’s chief counsellor sat at his right hand, “you have been taken in arms against your lawful sovereign; and are moreover charged with various acts of conspiracy to deprive him of his rights, as well as to misuse and oppress his faithful and loyal subjects. In particular, you are accused of having plotted, along with others of the late tyrant’s abettors, to take the life, by treasonable practices, of our most sacred Sovereign. What have you to advance in answer to these charges?”

"I deny them as base and calumnious," said De Worde. "That I was taken in arms I do not deny ; but I fought in behalf of, not against, my legitimate sovereign. That I have plotted, either singly or aided by accomplices, against the life of the Earl of Richmond, whom you designate the King of England, is a baseless falsehood. Nay, I affirm that his very person is unknown to me ; nor have I ever been in his presence until this day."

"Ha! Will you say that?" exclaimed the King, who had hitherto sat with his face partially concealed in his mantle, so that his features could not be distinguished. "Will you assert, my lord," rising as he spoke and removing his hat and plume, "that you and I have never met before?"

De Worde started back in amazement. The voice and features were alike familiar to him. It was the youth whom he had aided to escape from the coast of Wales—the stranger whom he had rescued from the assassins at Vannes.

"My lord," he said, after a moment's pause, amid the breathless astonishment of the room, "I must retract my former assertion. It is true that twice before I have encountered you ; and to you, above all men, I may surely appeal in witness against the falsehood that I have sought your life."

"True," replied the King, resuming his hat. "My

lords, Sir William de Worde has been a true friend of Richard of York ; but he hath been a yet truer one of Henry of Richmond. But for him I had not stood here this day to assume the crown your loyalty offers me. Twice hath he, at the imminent risk of his own life, delivered mine from mortal peril. My lords, you must forgive me if I pardon even so devoted a Yorkist and so stubborn a traitor—nay more, if I receive him into my service and account him henceforth among my friends ; always, that is to say, supposing that he is willing to become one.”

“Hurrah !” shouted Charlie Marchmont, as Dr. Bowles concluded ; “that is your sort. I like that kind of thing on both sides ! I didn’t fancy old Henry the Seventh had so much good stuff in him !”

“Nor I,” remarked Mr. Hartopp, quietly. “Dr. Bowles, that story of yours may be styled ‘curious, if true.’ It exhibits Henry Tudor in a new light at all events, which is interesting. I should have thought that he would infallibly have cut off William de Worde’s head—if on no other ground, at least because it might be expensive to be obliged to reward him !”

“Mr. Hartopp,” said Dr. Bowles, “you have always *so* decided a prejudice against the leading characters of

mediaeval history, that it is useless to argue with you! But it is not philosophical—not philosophical, sir, in a general point of view, nor as regards Henry Tudor in particular. I appeal to Mr. Marchmont, now, whether there is anything improbable in the history I have read to you.”

“Well,” said Mr. Marchmont, “I own I think Hartopp somewhat hypercritical. There is a good deal in the story which is very characteristic of Henry VII.: as for instance his revealing to William de Worde only just as much of his own circumstances, as was absolutely necessary in order to obtain his help, and deceiving him about the rest. Again, his not making himself known to his benefactor at Vannes was Henry Tudor all over. And as for the forgiveness of his prisoner at last, I suppose even Henry had some sense of gratitude in him; not to say that he must have foreseen that De Worde would prove a valuable ally, if he could gain him over.”

“Well,” said Mr. Hartopp, “there is something in that; but any way the clock is striking ten, and the Squire I suppose is going to ring for supper first, and prayers afterwards. Better things, both of them, than argument. Aren’t they, Squire?”

“Decidedly,” said the Squire; and the bell was rung accordingly.

CHAPTER VII.

ABOUT a week had elapsed since the day of Mr. Marchmont's arrival ; and he still continued to occupy his favourite room in the west wing, notwithstanding that the house during the whole of his stay had been one uninterrupted Babel of noise and confusion. A partial thaw had occurred on the morning of the 28th, sufficient to allow of the roads being cleared of snow ; and this having been effected, the return of frost which ensued was of little consequence in the eyes of the young dramatists. Tom Davis, with two assistants, a carpenter's bench, and a waggon load of planks and spars, had been transferred to the Court ; where he had remained ever since, taking his meals greatly to his own contentment in the kitchen, and only going home at night. The great hall, which had been fixed upon as the theatre, was a noble room fifty feet long, more than twenty broad, and thirty high. At the upper end was a small circular-headed door, by which the dais was approached ; and at the lower, a much larger one communicating with a square chamber, *which had once been the buttery of the castle.* In the

corner of this latter were two turret staircases, called corkscrews by Tom, communicating with smaller rooms on the floor above. No premises, unless constructed expressly for the purpose, could have been more suitable for private theatricals than these. About thirty feet of the long room was fitted with chairs and benches—the higher elevation of the dais allowing the back rows a clear view of the stage. A few feet in front of the first row a proscenium was erected, draped with scarlet—some old dining-room curtains having been devoted to that purpose. Over the centre was elevated a shield, emblazoned with a lion and unicorn; which had been discovered in the lumber room, and which (as Mr. Hartopp at first declared) had been formerly hung up in the church. But the alleged sacrilege was, after much controversy, disproved by the evidence of one Gideon Ray, a superannuated sexton; who affirmed that the old lion and unicorn in the church had dropped to pieces from age and damp when he was a boy; and that the shield up at the Court had formed part of the decorations at a great fête, given by the present Squire's grandfather on the occasion of George the Third's coronation. It was therefore allowed to retain its position, and having been cut out of its frame and retouched, had a highly imposing appearance.

The old buttery made a famous green-room; and

the small chambers above were easily converted by a few strips of carpet, looking-glasses, chairs, tables, etc., into suitable dressing rooms for the actors. So far all was easy. But the scenery and the lighting were more difficult matters. Tom Davis (who was proverbial for his inventive faculty) solved the latter problem, by procuring a series of wooden hoops and tin sconces from Ludlow, which he wreathed with holly and mistletoe, and suspended by iron chains from the hall ceiling, thus producing a most picturesque effect. But the scenery remained, as Tom expressed it, "a sticker." There were to be four scenes—two interiors, a garden scene, and a mountain pass. The first two were easily enough produced. Strong wooden frames covered with canvas, on which was pasted a drawing-room paper obtained from an upholsterer, with a few pictures in imitation frames, did very well for the scene inside the Spanish gentleman's house. To be sure, Mr. Marchmont told them that he was afraid drawing-room papers were scarcely known in Spanish houses, even at the beginning of the nineteenth, and certainly not at that of the seventeenth, century. But it was agreed that it would be impossible to observe historical accuracy in points so minute as these; and even if the scene was not exactly like the room intended to be represented, it would do every bit as *well*. On the same principle, a hall paper delineating

a series of statues in niches was universally allowed to form a very appropriate background for the Court of Justice. But the garden scene and the mountain pass were not to be managed anyhow. Tom's proposal to cut a lot of evergreens, and stick them about to represent a garden, was rejected for two reasons—first, because of the enormous quantity which would be required; and, secondly, because it would take such a length of time to arrange and remove them, as would quite weary the audience. After endless consultations and suggestions, the Squire was at last badgered into driving to Ludlow, and making inquiries at the provincial theatre there. Happily, after much search, an old drop scene was hunted up, depicting "a bower in Fairyland;" as well as part of a battered panorama which had once represented the Battle of Killiecrankie, with the Grampians in the background. The former of these—when a house frontage constructed of brown paper and painted by Archie had been pasted over it—conveyed tolerably well the notion of a garden, with a house in it. And although the scenery of the Grampians could not by any effort of the imagination be supposed to resemble that of the Castilian mountains, still it was, as Tom remarked, a mountain pass that was depicted; and that ought to be enough.

These great obstacles surmounted, the minor ones soon gave way to the energies of the youthful corps.

The three ladies, with all and several their ladies' maids, the head nurse and her attendant nymphs, were soon deeply engaged on the dresses of the peasants and peasant-women, who were to figure in the second and final scene of the play. The mantillas and bodices to be worn by Selina and Ellen, together with the robes of the judges, advanced expeditiously under the nimble fingers of the experienced needle-women; as did also the gown and scapulary of the Carmelite friar; though these last cost Mrs. Dennis, who was a staunch Protestant and no-Popery woman, many sore qualms of conscience. The masculine garments however, to be worn by Archie and his cousins, were pronounced to be beyond the skill of the native talent at Balderscourt. The village tailor and his assistants had to be called in for the purpose; and direly did the ancient Snip grumble over the strange and uncouth habiliments which he was required to construct; and which he declared to be wholly unfit for the wearing of Christian men.

When the preparations were about half completed, Sir Thomas Hartopp, otherwise "Uncle Tom," arrived, accompanied by his family, and the programme was finally determined. Uncle Tom, who was the idol of the boys, was elected stage manager by acclamation; and he took to his duties *con amore* forthwith. He assigned the four principal parts to Archie, Charlie,

and his two elder lads; fortunately all four having plenty to do and say, so that no one absorbed the entire interest of the play. The minor characters were given to Tom, George, and Willie; Selina and Ellen of course enacting the two ladies. As for Richard, he was himself well aware that he would only make a boggle of it, if he tried to take one of the prominent parts, and he gladly accepted the office of prompter, which his uncle allotted him. Rehearsals were held regularly every morning; and what with the able instruction they received, what with the boys' own natural talent for acting, everything promised fair for a great success. Various contretemps did of course occur. Father Hugo had an unlucky trick of treading upon his robes, which twice caused him to fall flat in a very unclerical fashion on the stage; and Archie's Vandyke puffed pantaloons had been made so tight by the inexperienced tailor, that when he went down on his knee before Selina in one of the most tragic situations in the play, they split open with a loud crack, and Archie was forced to start up and retire in confusion to his dressing-room. Moreover Selina could not for some time overcome her extreme uneasiness at being stabbed by Archie. In vain was it pointed out to her that the dagger, which had been procured from the Ludlow theatre, shut up into itself when its point was pressed, so that

it could not possibly hurt her. Vague fears that the machinery might possibly catch, so that she would be actually, instead of apparently, run through the heart, continued to haunt her imagination; and it was a long while before Uncle Tom could allay her fears. But the most unmanageable member of the corps dramatique was Master Tom. Dressed in scarlet robes as the senior judge, with a high black inquisitor's cap, and a Charles I. beard, he preserved, himself, the most edifying gravity. But every now and then he cast at the other actors glances so extremely comic, that the prisoner at the bar, who was arraigned in mortal terror before him, and even Father Hugo himself, whilst delivering his evidence, burst out into irrepressible laughter. The stage manager was so sorely scandalised at these irregular proceedings, as to threaten to degrade Tom from his judicial functions, and enthrone another in his place; which measure had at length the effect of reducing him to order.

As for the Squire, he was like a man who, intending only to light a candle, discovers that he has unwittingly set his house on fire. In vain did he protest that he had meant nothing more, than that the boys and girls should turn their jackets inside out, and put on scarfs and ribbons, and blacken their faces *with burnt cork*; and then act without scenery or

music under the gallery in the dining-hall. The enemy were too powerful for him to contend with, and he was routed, horse and foot, in every skirmish on which he ventured. Even Mrs. Wood was won over to the opposite side. It was generally supposed that the sight of Alf's scarlet pantaloons had effected her conversion. But be that as it may, she had been induced by Charlie Marchmont and Selina to suggest the hastening of Uncle Tom's visit, which was a final extinguisher to the Squire's opposition. Thenceforth he submitted with exemplary patience to every new proposal that was laid before him. All the neighbouring families were invited to form the audience; musicians to compose an orchestra were hired from Ludlow; the long drawing-room was cleared for dancing, and a splendid supper laid out in the dining-hall. As the day approached, the unfortunate man was fairly driven out of house and home, and took refuge with Mr. Hartopp; who had most carefully shunned the Court since the commencement of the preparations, assuring his sister that unavoidable engagements prevented his joining the party for the present.

"Well, Squire," said the parson, when the latter made his appearance after breakfast on the morning previous to the fatal day; "all this comes, in the first place, of a man's having a wife and children; and, in

the second, of his suggesting to them himself to turn his house topsy-turvy. If the fly invites the spider into his hole, what can he expect, but to be eaten?"

"Bother your wise sayings," growled the Squire. "It was your fault for putting that Spanish story into their heads at all. If I had so much as dreamed of what would come of it, I would have put poor Ned Penrose's MS. in the hottest fire that could be lighted. It isn't only my house that's turned topsy-turvy, as you call it, but my household too. The housekeeper and cook have gone crazy over the supper; all the men are up to their eyes in work, clearing out the long drawing-room and chalking the floors. I couldn't get my own fellow to answer the bell for three quarters of an hour; and at last I found he too had caught the infection, and was busy polishing up helmets and spears out of the armoury; to be worn, I am told, by the Spanish soldiers in the last scene."

"Mount your horse, Squire," suggested Mr. Har-topp, with a smile, "and ride with Grimes round the Manor Farm. You will soon have forgotten your troubles at home."

"I did think of that," returned Mr. Wood; "but on going to the stables I found that the girths had been taken out of the saddles to make cross-belts with, *I believe*, and every groom about the place had been

sent out on one message or another. As for Grimes, he is the sulkiest person about the place. He has had a tremendous row with Tom; who, it appears, had ordered one of the calves to be bled, in order to stain one of Selina's dresses with the blood! However, I *did* put a stop to that!"

"Well, Squire," said his brother-in-law, with much demureness of aspect, though inwardly, it is to be feared, he was greatly diverted, "well, Squire, you are in evil case I fear; but it is your kismet—destiny, as the Turks say; and again, it will be all over to-morrow night, as Mr. John Ketch suggests to his patients. You must look forward to that. I don't know that I can do anything for you, unless you would like to take a quiet chop and a bed here. You are quite welcome; and if Selina or Ellen send after you, I will barricade the doors and refuse admittance. Shall I give orders accordingly?"

"Why, not exactly," said the Squire, who could not help smiling at the proposal; "but I will tell you what you can do, and what in fact I called to ask you to do. You can come up and dine at the Court to-day—hear me out, there's a good fellow," hastily interjected the speaker, perceiving that a denial was on the tip of Mr. Hartopp's tongue. "Come and dine at the Court. I have made an agreement with old and young, that not one word is to be said about that

detestable play, from the moment we sit down to table to the moment that the last of the party goes off to bed. But Selina suggests that some amusement must be found for the youngsters; or it will be simply driving them to commit perjury in their present excited state. I have spoken to Bowles, and he has promised to read them another of his stories about the De Wordes—very interesting they are, by the bye—which he has been writing lately. But that won't fill up the evening by itself. Now do come up, and tell them that Sicilian adventure of Uncle Frank's. You know it, for I heard you relate it two or three years ago. It is a capital tale for boys, and will, I verily believe, drive this nonsense for the time out of their heads."

"It would not be for very long, I suspect," said Mr. Hartopp; "but why don't you ask Marchmont, or Thomas? You know that there is no possibility of exhausting Marchmont's stores."

"Marchmont, as ill luck will have it, has been sent for home to-day, and won't return before luncheon to-morrow. Thomas is no more of a hand at a story than I am myself; and besides, he is the maddest of the party. Do come, Hartopp; you really owe me one for having been the first suggester of this business."

"Well," said the parson after a pause, "if you will

guarantee that there shall be no theatrical discussions, nor rehearsals, nor anything whatever of the kind, I will do a deed of Christian charity for once, and come up to dinner. As for Uncle Frank's adventure, I wonder I never thought of it before. The boys are welcome to it, if I can recollect it."

Accordingly, as soon as the party had gathered after dinner round the Christmas fire, Dr. Bowles was requested to produce his MS., which he did as willingly as on the former occasions, and commenced the Tale of

THE PURITAN'S WARD.

I NEED not tell you that Sir William de Worde accepted the pardon extended to him by the new sovereign of England. Whatever scruples he might have retained, were removed by the marriage of Henry with Elizabeth, the unquestioned heiress of the house of York. He accepted a high office under the Government, which he retained for many years, and afterwards transmitted to his son. His grandson, Herbert, might have incurred the anger of the succeeding monarch, and lost both his patrimony and his life, by reason of his persistent attachment to the Romish faith; if it had not chanced that he received a mortal hurt in one of the innumerable passages of arms, which

the king's love of martial sports induced him to hold. His heir, who was an infant at his father's death, was brought up chiefly by a female relative, who had adopted the reformed religion, in which she educated her charge also. Walter de Worde (or Wode, as we find the name now written) might have figured among the brilliant gallants who surrounded the throne of the Maiden Queen, had he felt so inclined. But happily for himself and his family, he had but little fancy for courts and courtiers. The English aristocracy were now beginning to settle on their own estates, troubling themselves comparatively little with the political cabals of the day. Walter pulled down a considerable part of the outer defences of Castle Baldwyn, erecting in their stead the mansion, which remains but little altered since his day—this very room, boys, in which we are now sitting, among others. His son followed his example, continuing to sow his acres, plant his woods, and dispense justice among his tenantry, during the whole of Queen Bess's golden days.

"A vain, crafty, jealous, arbitrary, bloody-minded woman, to say no worse!" muttered Uncle Henry. "I beg pardon, Bowles, I could not help it: go on."

During the whole of *good* Queen Bess's golden days, resumed Dr. Bowles, emphatically; but unhappily the *next* scion of the family tree, Jasper, did not emulate

the career of his father and grandfather. He removed to the capital immediately on inheriting the family estates, and became one of the noisy roysterers who surrounded the favourite minister, Buckingham. The fair rose-nobles, accumulated during the frugal administrations of Walter and Richard Wode, transferred themselves with marvellous speed to plebeian coffers ; to the jeweller, the vintner, and the tailor—the gaming table and other equally discreditable pleasures absorbing yet more rapidly what might still remain. Sales of timber, raising of rents, mortgages, loans from usurers—the legitimate children of dissipation—followed one another in rapid succession. Before Sir Jasper—(he had been knighted at the instance of Buckingham)—had been ten years in possession of Balderscourt, he was a ruined man. He sought to mend his fortunes by a union with a rich city heiress, Mistress Grace Warner, the daughter of his principal creditor, a jeweller in East Chepe. But the expedient delayed the evil day only a few years. Sir Jasper's title-deeds had long passed into the hands of his father-in-law, who regarded him with no especial affection : and when, after five years of neglect, poor Dame Wode died at her father's house, of decline, as the doctors said, but, as he knew too well, of sorrow and desertion—the ire of John Warner was so greatly roused, that he vowed if it had not been for his little

grandson Alan Wode, the brilliant Cavalier who had broken his wife's heart should have ended his days in a debtor's prison. As it was, he permitted Sir Jasper to return to his dilapidated country house, with his infant son ; and even supplied him with a sufficient allowance to enable him to live respectably, though only in the most frugal manner. The old man's death followed speedily on that of his daughter, and he was succeeded in his business by his eldest son, William Warner. The latter, who had embraced the Republican notions of the day—though without the bitterness which characterized his brother-in-law, Master Houlton—had even less toleration for the broken Cavalier than his father had felt. Indeed, had young Alan Wode been cut off by any of the accidents which imperil childhood and early youth, it would still have gone hard with Sir Jasper: for the mortgages on the estate had long been foreclosed, and Balderscourt was the absolute property of William Warner, to be disposed of at his free pleasure. But the jeweller transferred the affection which he had felt for his sister, to her only child. The youth was a frequent visitor to his uncle in London, becoming a great favourite, both with him and with his daughter Mistress Lilian also. The favour of the latter was a prize, which many were anxious to obtain ; for Lilian was not only the belle of *the Chepe*, but the sole heiress (it was generally

believed) at once of her father's wealth, and of that of her uncle, Endurance Houlton—as the latter had chosen to re-christen himself, according to the fashion of the times. The last of these visits took place when Alan was nineteen, and Lillian seventeen years of age; and then matters had advanced so far, that a broad piece was broken between the young couple at their parting: and the father, though he condemned the haste of the proceeding, did not refuse his sanction to their union in two years from that time, if all should go well.

But all did not go well. The troubles, which darkened the political atmosphere of England during the seventeenth century, began to cast their shadows every year more gloomily over the face of society. William Warner, whose wealth and influence were feared by Strafford, and who had the reputation of being—what his brother-in-law was, though he was not—a fanatic and a leveller, was seized by order of the Star Chamber, and committed to prison. After a long interval he was tried and acquitted. But the anxiety and privations he had sustained—it was whispered the tortures also, which he had undergone in secret—so broke him down, that he died soon after his release. Intelligence of his mortal sickness having been received in Shropshire, Sir Jasper and his son journeyed to London with all speed, but arrived only in time to attend his funeral. This

was conducted with all decorum. Alan Wode and Leonard Warner, a distant cousin, officiated as chief mourners in the absence of the nearest of kin—for Endurance Houlton had, it appeared, left England, together with his niece Lilian, shortly before Warner's trial. Greatly chagrined at this intelligence, the Wodes, father and son, together with the other relations, met in the private chamber of the deceased man at the conclusion of the rites: where Master Joseph Staveley, his attorney, proceeded to read the will aloud. It was short, and dated nearly a twelve-month back. In the event of a marriage taking place between Alan Wode and Lilian Warner, the estate of Balderscourt, together with all other possessions of the testator, was to become the absolute property of the youthful couple. If, for any reason whatsoever, such marriage should not take place, the whole of the deceased man's possessions were to be held by the testator's brother-in-law Ralph, commonly called Endurance Houlton, as guardian of his daughter Lilian, until she should attain the age of five and twenty years, when they were to pass absolutely to her. In the event of her death without heirs of her body, every thing was to go to Master Leonard Warner, hosiery, of Aldersgate.

"It is well," said Sir Jasper, when the attorney had ceased. "It is known, I believe, to all here

present—or, if not, I here certify to them—that Mistress Lilian has betrothed herself with her father's full consent, to my son Alan Wode ; nor, I apprehend, could a more suitable marriage be devised.”

“Suitable for thee and thine, doubtless,” observed Leonard Warner ; “but there be others whom it may scarce suit so well.”

The old Cavalier looked at the trader with a mixture of surprise and scorn.

“Suitable for her also, Sir Flatcap,” he said sharply ; “and a distinction to the boot, for which she may well be thankful. Is it nothing for her to mingle her blood with that of the De Wordes ; which came hither with Duke William from Normandy, more than six centuries ago, and has ever since flowed in the veins of the highest of the land ?”

“The blood of Warner has already mingled itself with that of your house,” answered Leonard in the same tone, “and had little reason to value the privilege.”

The knight would have made an angry answer, but Alan interfered.

“I pray you, Master Leonard Warner, to moderate your tone,” he said. “Mistress Lilian Warner was free to choose whom she pleased, and if she deign to honour me with her choice, who is there that can gainsay it ?”

"I," exclaimed a deep voice, as a secret door in the panelling flew open, and disclosed the figure of a man, dressed in the ordinary costume worn by the Puritan party of that day, and armed with rapier and pistol. He was apparently about fifty years of age, strongly built, with the stern harsh face so common in the portraits of those days; and his manner, if not defiant, was pointedly ungracious.

"I," he repeated, "Endurance Houlton, brother of the true and godly man whom the minions of Charles have murdered. I will gainsay this union, unless certified that it is in all respects such as my brother would have approved."

Sir Jasper Wode had risen from his seat at the first appearance of the intruder, half drawing his sword, under the impression that some violence was intended. He now replaced his weapon, and said in a milder tone than might have been expected,—

"Master Houlton, I request your patience. It may not be known to you, that your late brother-in-law did not only assent to, but approve heartily of, the union betwixt my son and his daughter Lilian—of which I am prepared to offer, if needful, the fullest proof."

"It may be," retorted Endurance. "But he knew not then the full amount of oppression and wrong, which the malignants—that party to which thou and thine, I trow, belong—would inflict on the Commons

of England, if allowed. I hold that the judicial murder perpetrated on him, has cancelled any such contract as you speak of between his child and his oppressors. In any case, I, Lilian's appointed guardian, will never suffer her to wed with one who upholds her father's slayers. Do not interrupt me," he pursued, seeing Alan about to speak. "I grant that thou hadst not any immediate share in his death; but that avails not. Harken unto me. The faithful in this land will endure no longer the tyranny of Charles Stuart, his parasites and his butchers. They are on the point of raising the standard of the Lord and of Freedom. Wilt thou, young man, fight beneath it?"

Before Alan could answer, Sir Jasper, who had thus far suppressed his rage, though not without great difficulty, burst out into fury.

"Insolent Roundhead," he exclaimed, "dost thou presume not only to speak openly of treason in the presence of a loyal English gentleman, but to invite the heir of the De Wordes to share in it? If the pestilent traitors, of whom you speak, are indeed about to raise their rebellious flag, thou at least shall never join it. Gentlemen, ye have all heard the treason he hath uttered. I call upon you in the king's name, to aid me in seizing and carrying him before the nearest magistrate."

He advanced on Houlton as he spoke; but the Puritan drawing a pistol from his belt, fired at the sword arm of his antagonist. The bullet inflicted only a slight flesh wound, but sufficient to cause the knight to drop his sword. Before he could resume it, Endurance sprang backwards, and the door closed behind him. Pursuit was instantly made, but in vain. After the minutest search no trace of his presence could be found; nor could the subsequent exertions of Alan discover the slightest clue to the place of his retreat.

But if he himself could not be found, the truth of his predictions at least was soon discovered. Open hostilities were shortly afterwards declared, and in the August of the following year the king was compelled to set up the Royal Standard at Nottingham—to which place the loyal gentry of the neighbouring counties began immediately to resort, each with as many retainers as he could muster. Amongst others Sir Jasper Wode presented himself, though with but a slender following, considering the position which his family had held. His recruits were in fact but ten in number, comprising seven of his tenantry, two of his household servants, and his son Alan. The latter, independently of the loyalty towards his king by which he was animated, felt in the excitement of the approaching campaign some relief from the anxiety which his separation from Lilian caused him. Of her he had received no

further tidings ; nor could he hope to obtain any, unless chance should throw into his power Endurance Houlton ; from whom he might perhaps force the information at the point of the sword. The Wodes, notwithstanding the smallness of their muster, were received with distinction by Prince Rupert. Sir Jasper was appointed to a captaincy in the prince's own regiment of horse, Alan serving as a cornet in the same corps. The latter soon attracted the attention of the commander-in-chief by his soldierly qualities of steadiness, punctuality, and strict attention to orders—merits all the more conspicuous, because by no means common among his brother officers : and the first battle in which he was engaged—that of Edge Hill—proved that he was also gifted with coolness under fire, and rare capacity for command.

The particulars of that “day of false manœuvres” —words far more applicable to Edge Hill than Waterloo—are too well known to need repetition. The impetuous charge of Alan's regiment, led by Rupert in person, scattered the Parliamentary forces opposed to them with an ease, which almost justified the contempt with which the Cavaliers at that time regarded their enemies. The prince himself, as heedless as the youngest recruit in the army, followed the fugitives for fully two miles from the field, and was only checked by the approach of Hampden with the

enemy's artillery. When the Royalists returned, in the full confidence of a complete victory, to the scene of action, they found that the king's centre, left wholly unsupported, had been almost destroyed by Sir William Balfour—only two regiments retaining their ranks, and the king himself in the utmost danger of being taken prisoner. Rupert made immediate efforts to repair his error. He despatched messengers to recall as many as possible of the Royalists from the pursuit. He directed Alan in particular, who throughout the day had kept close to his side, to rally, if possible, a force sufficiently large to disperse a troop of the enemy's horse, who for the last half-hour or so, had been galling with disastrous effect the flank of the king's own regiment.

"Seest thou yonder pestilent rebel," he said, pointing with his sword to a figure arrayed in buff coat and steel cap, the latter of which projected so far as to hide his features; "the man will do the king good service who shall strike him from the saddle, and disperse the hornets of whom he is the chief. I have marked thee well to-day, Wode. Thy shoulders are but young, but thou hast an older head upon them, I wot, than that of thy general—though that, I fear me, is but a poor compliment, after such a mishap as mine!"

Alan bowed low. He hastened to execute the *order*; and by dint of great exertions, contrived to

get together some fifty troopers of various regiments. Cheering them to the onset, he led them gallantly against the force pointed out to him, which was in number about equal to his own. Alan found himself opposed in the *melée* to the leader of the hostile party. A sharp encounter followed, which ended in the rout of the Roundheads, who fled on all sides. A small knot however in the centre, still stood firm round their captain, who continued to offer a determined resistance; until his horse, struck by a musket ball, dropped under him. The shock of the fall burst asunder the fastenings of the steel cap, and the features of Endurance Houlton were disclosed. Springing from his saddle, Alan rushed instantly upon him, and presenting his sword at Houlton's throat, commanded him to yield himself prisoner. Before he could reply, two or three of the enemy imitated Alan's manœuvre, and surrounding the prostrate figure of Endurance, compelled the Cavalier to quit his hold. The latter was speedily reinforced by several of his troopers; and a hand-to-hand conflict arose, furious as that waged round the body of Patroclus. Headed by a youth, in whom Alan recognized Leonard Warner, the distant kinsman of his uncle, the Puritans fought with the most determined obstinacy. They were compelled at length to give way under the press of superior numbers; Leonard Warner was struck

down by a blow from Alan; and the Cavaliers were upon the very point of securing their principal prisoner; when the plain suddenly shook under the hoofs of horses, and a whole regiment of Parliamentary cavalry charged directly over them. Alan was beaten to the earth, stunned and bleeding. When he at length recovered his senses, he found that the battle had entirely ceased, and that his father, attended by the surgeon of the regiment, was bending anxiously over him. A slight examination sufficed to show that he had sustained no worse injury than some severe bruises. But when immediate search was made for the person, alive or dead, of Endurance Houlton, it proved entirely futile. No trace of him or of Leonard Warner could anywhere be discovered.

The conflict at Edge Hill, though it proved of little service to the cause of Charles, made the reputation of Alan Wode. He was promoted to a captaincy in one of Wilmot's regiments, and knighted by the king's own hand on the field of battle. He was equally successful at Lansdown and Roundway Down; receiving the colonelcy of his regiment as the reward of his services at the last-named victory. But prosperous as his military career had been, there were two circumstances which had caused him so much distress, as to cancel the satisfaction which he would *otherwise have felt*. The first of these was the death

of his father, who fell mortally wounded at Lansdown, in one of the last charges of that bloody day. The early errors of Sir Jasper's career were unknown to his son, and he had always been a kind and even indulgent father. It was natural therefore that the young man should be deeply grieved at his loss. But his continued separation from Lilian was a source of still greater disquietude. More than two years had now passed, and he had not received the slightest information that she retained any recollection of him; or even that she still existed. His imagination suggested to him a hundred anxieties—the most prominent among which was jealousy of Leonard Warner; who, as he had learnt from sure information, had long been a suitor for her hand. His appearance in arms at the battle of Edge Hill, fighting in Endurance Houlton's own troop, boded him no good. Nor could he disguise from himself, that if Lilian Warner had been really anxious to cause some tidings of herself to reach his ear, some means must have suggested themselves of effecting her object during the long interval of their separation. Alan brooded over these thoughts till he became moody and solitary; and Lord Wilmot, noticing his despondency, resolved immediately after the action at Roundway Down, to despatch him to Oxford, to bear tidings to the king of the victory which had been obtained.

"It is a service of some danger," he said, "and therefore I select you for it. The villages between this and Abingdon are mostly filled with Essex's soldiers, and you must travel with secrecy and caution. But it is of urgent importance that the king should receive these despatches without loss of time; and there is no man in the army to whom I can more confidently trust them, than yourself."

Alan willingly undertook the commission; and within an hour, dressed as a yeoman, and mounted on a strong, but not showy-looking horse, set out on his journey. His early residence in the rural districts enabled him to personate successfully the character he had assumed. The first twenty miles were surmounted in safety. He passed through several villages, where he was stopped more than once, and questioned by the Parliamentary soldiers who occupied them. But his demeanour was so easy, and his replies so natural, that no suspicion was aroused. The afternoon was drawing on, when he entered a small hamlet, which lay a few miles distant from Abingdon, and which appeared to be the last outpost of the Republican army. As he rode up to the door of the village inn, he saw several Roundhead soldiers seated on the ale-bench, with stoups of liquor before them, engaged in the theological discussion, where-with it was their somewhat peculiar fashion to

enliven their potations. They broke off however on his arrival, to enquire whether he came from the neighbourhood of Reading, and if so, what news had been received from Sir William Waller in the west.

"Nay, I cannot tell you," replied Alan. "I am from the north, and have turned aside to rest horse and man here for awhile. I have heard nought of Waller's army."

"And what be the tidings from the north, then?" said one of the party, a non-commissioned officer apparently. "Thou canst at least tell us that."

He fixed his eye keenly upon him, as he spoke, and Alan involuntarily started and changed colour; for in his questioner he recognised Leonard Warner.

"Ha! you start," pursued Leonard; "and your seat and carriage, methinks, are somewhat military for the country grazier you pronounce yourself. Seize his rein," he exclaimed quickly, as he saw Alan plunge his spurs into his horse's sides. "I thought from the first that his features were not unknown to me. By heaven," he added, as the young man was torn from his horse after a struggle, during which the wig and hat which had disguised his face were torn off, "it is Alan Wode! This is indeed a prize! Have him to the guard-room, comrades, and search him carefully."

Alan made no further resistance. His arms were

tied behind his back, and further secured by one of the trooper's belts buckled tight round him. In this guise he was led to a large house by the road-side ; which, it appeared, was the quarters of the officers commanding the detachment. Several of these, wearing the Parliamentary uniform, were seated engaged in conversation when he entered ; among whom he recognised, at a glance, Endurance Houlton.

"Whom have we here?" exclaimed Houlton, starting up. "Alan Wode—a prisoner, and in disguise? How hath this befallen?"

"He has just been seized," said Leonard, "on his way, doubtless, to the camp of the malignants. It were well to hold a court-martial on him without delay. But first let the prisoner be searched."

Alan submitted quietly to the operation, knowing the uselessness of resistance ; and in a few minutes his despatches were drawn forth from the collar of his coat, and perused by Houlton.

"Ha!" exclaimed the latter, as his eye travelled rapidly over the paper. "These be evil tidings, if true ; as I fear me they are. But they must be instantly despatched to the Lord General. Let some one forthwith ride with all speed to Reading, and deliver them."

"Meanwhile, what is to be done with the prisoner?" enquired Leonard Warner. "He is a notorious rebel,

and has ventured in disguise within our lines. What sentence does the court pronounce upon him ?”

“Let the malignant be hanged from yonder tree,” said one of the officers—“after sufficient space has been allowed him, that is, for prayer and exhortation.”

“Nay,” said Endurance, “he can scarcely be counted as a spy, seeing that he was charged with despatches.”

“To be taken in disguise in the camp of an enemy, merits death by the laws of war in every country in Europe,” interposed Leonard, hotly.

“It may be,” said Endurance. “But we will at least inquire the judgment of the Lord General on this subject. Do thou thyself take horse, Leonard Warner, and carry these papers to the Lord Essex without loss of time. Enquire also his pleasure concerning the prisoner ; whom till thy return we will keep in secure custody.”

Warner would again have remonstrated ; but he was checked by a stern glance from his superior officer. He rose sullenly and left the apartment ; and immediately afterwards Alan was conveyed by two soldiers to a room on the first floor of the house, where the door was closed and locked behind him.

The young Cavalier cast an anxious glance round him as his captors disappeared. The windows were

small, narrow, and defended by strong iron bars. The door by which he had entered was of massive oak, and secured on the outside, as he had noticed on entering, by huge iron bolts. There was no chimney ; and the large beams of the ceiling, crossed by solid planks above, would have rendered it impossible for him to escape in that direction, even if his hands had been free and the house unguarded. There was however one entrance to the room, which did not appear to be so strongly defended. This was a door in the inner wall of the house, leading probably to another apartment. It was of oak, and was doubtless locked ; but it did not appear to have other fastenings. The love of life stimulated Alan to attempt his escape by it, desperate as the prospect of success seemed to be. By a great exertion of strength, he contrived to snap the cord by which his wrists were bound, and to work first one arm free, and then the other, from the belt which had been fastened round them. He next essayed the door ; which, as he had expected, was secured on the other side, and resisted his efforts. But to his extreme surprise, he had no sooner desisted from the attempt, than the door was opened from the inside, and a female entered the apartment.

Alan started back in great amazement, which was apparently shared by the fair intruder : or, if not, some other feeling kept her silent, and each continued to

gaze on the other for several minutes without speaking.

At length Lilian broke the silence, saying, in a constrained and embarrassed tone—

“Alan, is this really you?—what madness has brought you here?”

“Yes, it is I, Mistress Warner,” returned the Cavalier, bitterly. “I am a prisoner, and in your uncle’s power. There was a time when my presence would not have caused you so much displeasure. But no matter. The fire of his soldiers will soon spare you the pain of recalling to your recollection, one whom you have so long forgotten.”

“Forgotten you, Alan?” returned Lilian. “No, never. You know well what has come between us. But do not stop to speak of it. This is no time for explanations. Follow me instantly. This corridor leads to my chamber, from which there is a private staircase to the garden. A few minutes will place you in safety.”

He followed her without a word, like a man in a dream, while they passed in safety down the secret staircase, and along the pleached alley of a large neglected garden. But when Lilian opened the gate at its further end, and pointed to the wood which lay at the distance of scarce a hundred yards, Alan refused to go further.

"Lilian," he said, "I cannot part from you thus. You have told me that something has come between us, and that I know what that something is. You are in error there; and I cannot depart till I have learned it."

"Do not linger, I implore you," she again exclaimed. "Every moment of your stay here is winged with death."

"But I should carry worse than death away with me, if I went. Tell me, Lilian, once more, what has come between us?"

She cast down her eyes, and a deep blush suffused her cheek, as she said—

"I can scarce credit the tale; but I have been assured that it was at the instigation of Sir Jasper and yourself, that my dear father was arrested and imprisoned."

"At mine and my father's!" cried Alan, indignantly. "What villain has dared to utter such a slander, as that we betrayed our dear and honoured kinsman to his death?"

"No, do not mistake," said Lilian. "It was only in order that he might be compelled to surrender the estate of Balderscourt, of which he had become possessed. No one has charged you with attempting to compass his death."

"The one calumny is as false as the other," said

Alan. "By the blue sky above me, I would have crossed rapiers with the best swordsman in England, who had dared but to hint at such treachery to me. Lillian, Lillian, how could you believe it?"

"Those whom I am bound to heed told me so," returned the maiden, again blushing under Alan's gaze. "But I will credit it no more—nay, believe me, I do not think I ever really did credit it."

"Bless you for that, Lillian," said the youth. "But for those who have thus foully slandered me to you, they shall dearly rue it. Your kinsman, Endurance Houlton——"

"No, no, it was not he," interposed Lillian, hurriedly. "He is a stern man, and abhors your faction, but he would not stoop to malign you. Nay, it is so, indeed. I did not mean to tell you; but it is by his permission—I should say of his contrivance—that I have been enabled to effect your release. He knew that your death was certain if you remained; and—little, alas! as he loves you—he could not bear that his kinsman's nephew should die like a felon. It was not he who accused you, nor knew he aught of it."

"Leonard Warner, then, was my calumniator!" exclaimed the Cavalier. "I have heard already that he is an aspirant to your hand. I fear not his rivalry——"

"You need not, Alan," murmured the maiden, who had now laid aside all her assumed coldness, and saw only the Alan of former years. "It is true that he does seek me as his wife, and my uncle favours his suit. I cannot break the vow of obedience which I have taken, by wedding you ; but be sure I will never be the bride of Leonard Warner—unless, indeed, my father's command to obey my uncle in all things should compel me. But there is no fear of that, believe me."

"I know not that. Nay, think better of this, Lilian. We were betrothed with your father's free consent, and who can cancel a parent's wishes? This moment may be the turning point of our lives. Fly with me ! One hour will place us in safety within the walls of Abingdon ; another hour will unite us at the altar."

He placed his arm round her waist, and would have drawn her into the path, but she resolutely drew back.

"No, Alan," she said, "I have already told you that my father made me promise solemnly, at my last parting from him, that I would obey Uncle Houlton as my guardian until I complete my five-and-twentieth year. I dare not break that promise ; and besides, remember it is by his generosity alone that you have been delivered this day from imprisonment and death.

Would it be honourable to requite him by acting as you propose?"

"You are right, Lilian," said Alan, drawing himself up, "I had forgotten that. Bear him, I pray you, my thanks for the service he has so generously rendered me this day. The time may come when I shall repay it. Commend me at the same time to Master Leonard Warner; I may live to requite him also. Farewell till you are free; but we will endure in trust and hope."

He pressed her tenderly to his heart; then, turning aside, plunged into the woodland path, and in a few minutes was lost to view; while Lilian returned cautiously to her own chamber.

Alan was received with much distinction by King Charles, notwithstanding the loss of the despatches; and after a stay of some weeks at Oxford, he rejoined the army with augmented honours. But he helped to win no more victories. The transient gleam of success which had gilded the royal arms in the North and West soon died out: and the prospect of final success in the struggle with the Commons of England daily grew more feeble. Newbury and Marston Moor inflicted heavy blows on the hopes of the Royalists; and the defeat at Naseby finally extinguished them. Sir Alan Wode continued to adhere stedfastly to the fortunes of the fallen king; and when the latter

was conveyed to London to undergo his trial, he was one of those who followed the royal captive thither, and engaged in several of the desperate conspiracies formed for his deliverance. The protracted excitement afforded him relief from the anxieties, to which he would otherwise have been a continual prey. Nearly six years had now passed since his last interview with Lilian Warner, and during the whole of that time he had not only remained true to her memory—notwithstanding the many fair faces which had looked approvingly upon him—but had abstained with the most punctilious honour from seeking any renewal of intercourse with her. For six years she had bound herself by a solemn promise to obey her guardian's wishes, and, bitter as was the sacrifice, he would not tempt her to break it. But as Lilian's five-and-twentieth birthday drew near, the heart of the young Cavalier began to throb with hopes and fears which it was impossible for him to quell. He had heard much of Endurance Houlton during the last five years. Like many of his party, the violence of his fanaticism had increased with the success which had attended his designs; and he was now one of those who had insisted peremptorily on the adoption of the Five Points, by all who desired to be accounted faithful.

"The Five Points!" exclaimed the Squire, who, though he rarely paid much attention to the stories,

was startled at the statement of Dr. Bowles. "What! had they their Five Points in those days too? I fancied that was altogether a modern notion."

"There is nothing new under the sun, Squire," said Mr. Hartopp. "I have no doubt their Five Points were almost as practicable and reasonable, as those of their successors of the present day; but I must confess to my ignorance respecting them. Tell us what they were, Bowles."

"Hem," said Dr. Bowles, "they were peculiar, certainly. They demanded the abolition—first of all tithes; secondly, of all Christian ministers of whatsoever denomination; thirdly, of all magistrates; fourthly, of the observance of Sunday; and lastly, of the Bible. I do not mean," observed Dr. Bowles, looking round on the blank faces of amazement, "that the Independents generally adopted these extreme views; but the party called the Levellers certainly did so, of which there is the fullest proof. But to proceed. Among these enthusiasts, Endurance Houlton had rendered himself conspicuous: and had lately proceeded to such extravagances, that the Government had been compelled to issue a warrant for his apprehension. Leonard Warner, though he did not share his kinsman's theological mania, had nevertheless continued his fast ally in all he undertook—his object being, as Alan too surely surmised, to obtain the hand

of Lilian as his reward. As the fourth of February, which was Lilian's birthday, drew near, Alan's doubts and anxieties grew overpowering ; and had it not been that these were nearly balanced by his solicitude respecting the fate of his sovereign, his life would have been insupportable.

It was on the evening of that memorable day, the twenty-ninth of January—as the youthful Cavalier was sitting alone in his lodgings, worn out by grief and the unsuccessful exertions which for the last few days had unceasingly employed his energies—that a letter, in the well-remembered writing of Lilian, was delivered into his hands. Alan eagerly tore it open. It was dated two days back, and its contents awoke very mingled feelings. First, the writer assured him that her affection for him was unchanged, and had undergone no change, during the lengthened term of their separation. She had continued resolute in her rejection of Leonard Warner's suit—urged though that had been with unwearied pertinacity, and supported by all the weight of her guardian's influence. Of late she had observed a change in Master Warner's demeanour which had filled her with apprehension, and had been the cause of her addressing the present letter to Alan. Her uncle's intellect was, to her mind, gradually becoming impaired, and Leonard's influence seemed to grow stronger every day with him.

The latter had always peremptorily refused to put any restraint on her inclinations : but Master Warner was now growing desperate, as the prospect of ultimately losing the prize became more imminent. She feared that the fourth of February would not be allowed to pass, without some determined attempt being made to compel her marriage with Leonard. Therefore she implored Alan to keep a vigilant watch over Master Warner's movements, and be nigh at hand to rescue her from his machinations, if needful.

Without a moment's loss of time Alan seized his sword and cloak, and was on the point of hurrying forth to seek the aid of two of his companions—Royalists like himself, with whom for the last few weeks he had been plotting schemes for Charles' rescue—when the door was thrown violently open, and the two men he was about to seek rushed into the room.

"Ha, Palmer! Warrington! This is fortunate," exclaimed Alan. "I was this very instant on the point of going forth to ask your assistance. It is well I had not quitted my apartment."

"It is indeed," said Warrington. "We have learned within the last hour, that a warrant to apprehend us on a charge of treason against the State was signed two hours ago by the arch-traitor Cromwell, and his officers have already set forth to execute it."

We must fly without a moment's loss of time. Our horses are already saddled at a neighbouring hostelry ; and we must ride for our lives to the coast of the Thames near Gravesend. There we have promise that a Dutch merchantman will take us on board for Holland."

"I cannot, I cannot!" exclaimed Wode, distractedly. I have a matter in hand so urgent that I cannot quit London, whatsoever peril may beset me there, until I have accomplished it."

"Accomplished it!" exclaimed Palmer. "You are mad to speak of it. I tell you in a few minutes more, if you delay, you will be in the hands of Cromwell's soldiers, and will accomplish no more business of whatsoever kind in this world, save that of laying your head upon the block. Escape now, and you may hereafter fulfil your purpose, whatsoever it may be. Remain, and you will never fulfil it at all."

Alan felt that it would be indeed madness to persist. In an agony of despair he accompanied his friends to the spot where their steeds awaited them, and rode through the darkness of the night by unfrequented ways, and with the utmost speed which their steeds could command, to the coast of the Thames. About midnight a storm came on ; and in the darkness and confusion the travellers parted company. When morning broke, Alan found himself alone by the bank of the

river, and close at hand a small Dutch-built vessel, the crew of which apparently were on the point of making sail. Alan hailed them, and a boat immediately put off and conveyed him on board.

The captain, hearing he wished to be conveyed to the coast of Holland, and was willing to pay a large sum in gold for his passage, discreetly forbore all questions; but received the sum offered, and, lifting his anchor, immediately made sail. Alan was sitting near the stern of the ship, sadly watching the receding shores which contained the being he loved best on earth; but who, as he feared, was irrevocably parted from him, when he was aroused by a sharp tap on the shoulder. He started up. Two men were standing close at his side, in whom he instantly recognized—notwithstanding the changes which years had made in them—Master Houlton, and his kinsman Leonard Warner. His first thought was that their purpose was to arrest him; and his hand stole mechanically to the hilt of his sword.

"Lay not thine hand upon thy weapon, young man," exclaimed the elder, "we mean thee no violence. We are fugitives, as thou art, from yonder unhappy land; which the Lord for its sins hath given over to its own blindness."

"And Lillian?" exclaimed Alan, eagerly; "is she also on board *this* vessel?"

"She is not," replied Endurance, sternly. "Nor, if she were, could there be aught betwixt her and thee?"

"I know well that it is thy purpose to prevent it, if thou canst," retorted the Cavalier, "and thine too, Master Warner. But ye may yet be baffled. You are a soldier, sir," he added, addressing the last named, "and should shame to compass by base means, what brave men win openly, and in the face of day. Will you cross swords with me on the deck of this vessel in this quarrel—the vanquished to resign all claim to the hand of Lilian Warner?"

Before Leonard had time to reply, Endurance interposed.

"I forbid such combat," he said. "Not only does her father's murder forbid that Lilian should wed with thee; but it hath been revealed to me from above, that she is the destined wife of Leonard Warner. Too long hath my carnal weakness opposed itself to the will of the Lord; yet now that mine eyes are opened, I will make speedy atonement for my fault. Four days yet remain, before Lilian shall be legally exempt from my control. Till then she has vowed to obey me; and I have made a solemn vow that, before that time shall elapse, she shall be Leonard's wife. Trouble thyself no further with us," continued the old man, the light of insanity kindling in his eye

more plainly as he proceeded ; "I would not harm thee, though I love thee not ; but we have enough in this ship able and willing to bind thee hand and foot, and cast thee, like Jonah, into the sea, if thou shouldst attempt violence."

So saying he turned abruptly away, and, accompanied by Warner, descended to the cabin.

Alan resumed his seat near the helm more sadly than before. It was but too plain that Lilian was in their power, and that they were resolved to use that power without scruple. Nor could he do anything in his present position to prevent it. Endurance had spoken no more than the truth when he said, that he had sufficient force at his command to cast him into the sea, if he chose to use it. He must abide his time, and endeavour to defeat their schemes when safely landed in Holland. But he could not disguise from himself, that the prospect of attempting this with any likelihood of success was but slight.

As he sat buried in these mournful reflections, he became sensible that a change of weather had occurred ; of which his abstraction had hitherto caused him to take no notice. An hour before, the moon had been sailing placidly through the sky, and the waves were gleaming brightly in the silver light. Now, darkness had come on ; the waters were breaking into foam ; and the wind, rising in fitful gusts,

proclaimed in angry moans the renewal of the tempest of the previous night. The captain gave orders to reduce the sails ; and the men, who were well aware of their danger, worked steadily and in silence. The canvas had scarcely been taken off the ship, when the gale burst in all its fury upon them. The waves roared, as they rose mountains high, and broke at intervals on the deck, sweeping away the men at the helm, and dashing the rudder itself into fragments. The ship became a mere log on the water, and no one made any effort to repair the mischief. The crew and passengers crouched down under the bulwarks, sheltering themselves as well as they were able from the violence of the waves, but expecting every moment that the ship would go to pieces. It was a long and dreadful night. At length the morning dawned, grey and sullen ; showing on their lee quarter a rocky shore, very different from the low sandy coast of Holland, and showing how far they must have been driven from their course.

It had now become evident that the ship could not float long, and, notwithstanding that the strife of the elements still continued unabated, the boats were launched. The men took their places in them with less confusion and haste than might have been expected. Alan's coolness and nerve were now of the *utmost* service. He persuaded his countrymen to

allow the Dutch sailors to man the first boat; pointing out that there was ample time for all to escape, provided they did not impede each other's movements. He himself, ably seconded by Endurance, to whom the presence of danger seemed to have restored the full possession of his reason, directed the embarkation. It was not until all but himself and Houlton were safe on board, that he prepared to follow them. But as he was about to spring from the side of the now fast sinking ship, Leonard Warner, with his drawn dagger, opposed his entrance.

"Stand back, Sir Alan Wode!" he said, the full villany of his nature revealed at last in his red eye and quivering lip, "the boat will hold no more. There is scarce room for my kinsman, if indeed for him. We will not have our lives endangered. Stand back, I say, or I stab you to the heart!"

"Hold, Leonard!" exclaimed the sonorous voice of Houlton; "I command you to take him on board. I will not depart without him!"

"Fool!" shouted Warner, angrily, "have you not yet discovered that we shall never move Lillian to our purpose while he lives? Nay, we have no time to lose; stay and share his fate, if you will; I am well rid of both. You are no longer necessary to my purpose."

He stooped and cut the lashings with his knife, and the men, who had already lowered their oars, commenced rowing from the vessel. But at the same moment there broke from the clouds immediately above them a sheet of flame, followed by a deafening crash. The mainmast, shattered by the lightning, fell over the side. It struck the boat, which had not yet moved many feet on its way, and sank it in a moment. Such of the crew as were not stunned by the blow tried, with frantic efforts to reach the wreck. But the tide, which was running rapidly in the opposite direction, swept them away with remorseless speed, and in a few minutes the last of them had disappeared.

Alan turned away in horror to assist Endurance Houlton; who had been struck by a splinter of the mast, and lay senseless on the deck. He perceived at a glance that the ship could not float many minutes longer. Catching up an axe which lay close at hand, he severed the ropes which still held the wreck of the mast, and climbing on to one of its cross spars, dragged Endurance after him. He had scarce done so, when the vessel sank, leaving the two men clinging to the floating spar, which the tide slowly swept towards the distant shore.

The rest is soon told. After many hours of incessant exertion Alan succeeded in reaching the coast,



The vessel sank, leaving the two men clinging to the floating spar;—p. 240.

and would have carried on his shoulders the exhausted form of his companion, who had now at last recovered his consciousness ; but the latter forbade him.

“Do not attempt to remove me,” he said ; “my hurt is mortal, and I have but a short time to live. If I have wronged others, it is too late now to ask their forgiveness, or make reparation. Not so with thee. I have done thee injustice, as this night has shown me, and I entreat thy pardon. Hasten to the house of my kinsman, Herr Schonwelt, of Liege. At his house thou wilt find Lillian. Bear to her my dying assurance that all is peace between thee and me, and that I freely consent to your union.”

He pressed Alan's hand feebly as he spoke ; raised his head for a moment ; and then, with one long sigh, fell back and expired.

CHAPTER VIII.

"PAPA," said Selina, "is not that Sir Alan Wode's picture, which hangs in the long drawing-room, on the right hand of the fireplace?"

"Yes," said the Squire, "and his wife, Dame Lilian Wode, hangs on the opposite side. Both portraits are by Gerard Dow."

"And his buff coat and steel cap are fixed in the recess between the windows in the hall," said Archie.

"Yes, Master Archie," said the Squire, "and his sword too. At least, it was there yesterday."

"I took it down to clean it this morning," returned Archie. "I mean to wear it——"

Mrs. Wood put up her finger with a warning look,—

"You have forgotten, Archie," she said; "though I must at the same time in justice say that papa provoked it. But come, Dr. Bowles, have you nothing more to tell us of the family after Sir Alan's time?"

"Not much, madam," said the Doctor. "Sir Alan lived abroad with his lady until the time of the *Restoration*, when he returned to England. But I

believe he seldom appeared at Whitehall. The court manners suited neither him nor Dame Lilian. He had a son named John Wode——”

“Who was popularly called ‘Logwood,’” interposed Mr. Hartopp. “It was a happy thing for the family, I fancy, that he deserved that appellation. He was too indolent to side either with James’s party or William’s at the Revolution, and by consequence kept his estate uninjured.”

“At all events, his son took up arms for the Stuarts in 1715,” interposed the Squire, a little nettled.

“True,” said the incorrigible Mr. Hartopp. “So he did. He mustered all the tenants he could get together, and marched to join the Pretender at Preston. But by good luck, he mistook the Preston in Gloucestershire for the one in Lancashire; and before he could correct his mistake, the news of the total dispersion of the rebels arrived. He very judiciously marched home without loss of time, and turned his tenants into their fields again. They called him ‘Greenwood;’ but I doubt if the sobriquet was well applied. But come, Squire, don’t be angry; you will allow that the name given to his son of ‘Drywood’ was, at all events, appropriate enough. You remember when he was entreated by the partisans of George the Second, and by those of the young Pretender also, to take part in the struggle of ’45, he

replied 'that to his mind it signified very little whether England were governed by a German Boor or a Scotch Papist; but that it signified a good deal to him, whether he retained or lost the family estate.'

"Come," said Mrs. Wood, who perceived that the Squire, although he could not help laughing, was inwardly disturbed by this somewhat irreverent handling of his ancestors, "we are getting very near our own times now. Philip Wood, who, as you say, wisely remained at home during the Rebellion of '45, was the Squire's great-grandfather; and all the world knows that his son and grandson were called 'Touchwood' and 'Firewood,' as well as my husband himself 'Brushwood,' from his feats in the hunting field—a name of which he is in reality a little proud. Well, Dr. Bowles, if you have no more histories to relate of the Wood family, I suppose we must consider the chronicle of their achievements to be closed."

"Well, no," said Mr. Hartopp, "I believe I can add one more chapter, the hero of which is the Squire's own uncle, born in the year 1785—just a year or two before the outbreak of the French Revolution. I think his adventure may match for singularity even with those related by Dr. Bowles. And as I have promised the Squire to relate it, I will begin it at *once*. I shall call it—

"THE CORNET OF DRAGOONS."

It was in the year 1806, when several English regiments were quartered at Palermo, that the affair of which I am going to tell you, occurred. An English fleet was lying in the harbour, in which my friend Preston's ship was included—neither arm of the service being quite sure as to what might be the place of their destination, or who the enemies whom they would be called upon to confront to-morrow. The Sicilians in general—the upper classes that is—received them with courtesy and hospitality; but with the lower orders the case was different. I believe our soldiers and sailors are seldom very popular in any foreign country which they visit; even though their errand, as in the present instance, may be a friendly one. Be that as it may, it is certain that continual quarrels took place between our fellows and the townsmen. Scarcely a night passed in which a British soldier or sailor was not stabbed in some fray with the Palermitans. The authorities when appealed to looked grave, and promised that every possible effort should be made to discover and punish the authors of the violence. But somehow nothing ever came of it but parchment and legal processes; until at last the English admiral waxed impatient, and informed the Sicilian commandant that if another English sailor

should be assassinated, he would straightway bombard the town. As he was known to be a man who would infallibly keep to his word at whatever cost, the authorities did not judge it prudent either to defy or disregard this menace. Possibly their police were more successful in their efforts than they had been before; possibly they exerted themselves more vigorously; possibly the threat itself had got wind, and the inhabitants were shy of bringing shot and shell about their ears. Anyhow the desired result ensued. Not a single British subject, so far as Preston could learn, sustained any serious injury in the streets of Palermo from that day forward.

But this result, however satisfactory in itself, did not tend to make the British more popular; on the contrary, it was evident enough, from the angry glances of the men and the half-uttered reproaches of the other sex, that if an English fleet were not lying off the town—the guns of which could lay the whole city in ruins whenever it might be the admiral's pleasure to do so—but small favour would have been extended to the strangers.

This, however, does not directly concern the story which I am going to tell you. Your great-uncle, Frank, was in the ——th regiment of Dragoons at that time—a young fellow of one-and-twenty or so, and a very general favourite with his brother

officers; perhaps on account of his utter recklessness and insensibility to danger. Frank had been present along with Harry Preston and several of his brother officers at some party, where he was greatly impressed by the beauty of a Sicilian lady of high rank; whose father, a rich and powerful noble, resided some twenty miles from Palermo. According to Frank's confidential statements to Harry, the Signorina (whose true name I need not mention, but whom we will call Lucia di Pisani) was as deeply enamoured as himself, and gave him numerous opportunities of cultivating her acquaintance. Preston's own opinion however, as well as that of Frank's brother officers—though they took care not to utter it in his hearing—was that the lady was simply amusing herself with a flirtation to relieve the tedium caused by the absence of one Cavaliere di Ruspini, to whom she was betrothed. One evening however at a masquerade, she drew Ensign Wood on one side, and told him, with downcast eyes, that she had received a summons to quit the city in the course of a few days for her father's castle; nor would she in all likelihood return to Palermo for many months. Overwhelmed with despair at this intelligence, Frank declared his intention of following her to the mountains, in the hope that in those wild solitudes they might meet again. The lady received the proposal with an enchanting

smile ; accompanied however with an assurance that he must forego his romantic purpose ; as the neighbourhood of the Count di Pisani's castle was unhappily infested with robbers, amongst whom it would be hazardous in the extreme for any persons to venture, who were not escorted by a strong military force. Brave as the Inglesi were acknowledged to be, it would exceed even their hardihood to essay such an adventure ; particularly, as the Signorina added, with a blush and a sigh, for so insignificant a purpose.

I dare say you will not be surprised to hear that this consideration only made Master Frank more determined to carry out his purpose. But there were some wiser heads, even in His Majesty's —th regiment of Dragoons ; and these, as well as Preston, did their best to dissuade him.

"Ye'll no have heard muckle of this ill-guided people, I am thinking," said Archie Findlay, a junior captain, whose brogue and caution alike declared him a native of North Britain, "or, my certie, ye wadna think of venturing your life amang them. They have nae mair honesty than a Hieland reiver, and less mercy than a whinstane craig ; and as for vindeectiveness, if ye chance to fall out wi' them, the deevil himsell couldna match them."

"Pooh !" said Frank, "they would not venture to rob a British officer, even if I had anything worth

their taking. And as for vindictiveness, what should I do, that would be likely to provoke them ? ”

“ Well, to be sure,” said Wallace, “ there is something in what you say, about having nothing of which they could rob you. But, at all events, you have your life, and they might have a fancy to take that. Be ruled, there’s a good fellow. Follow Preston’s advice, and give the thing up. It would be sheer madness.”

Well, they thought they had succeeded in persuading their friend to forego his resolution. But they were mistaken. It was much the same thing as if any one had advised Tom here not to climb into a high elm after a bird’s nest, or Willie not to get his feet wet by running on the damp grass. A spice of contradiction only lends a flavour, I suppose, to whatever young madcaps undertake ; as Bedreddin Hassan’s cream tarts are said to have derived their relish from the dash of pepper with which they were seasoned.

About a week after the masquerade Frank disappeared one day, without having given any previous intimation of his intentions. He had ridden out a few miles with his servant, and sent him back with the horses ; only telling him, that he could not say with certainty when he would be likely to return. Of course none of his friends could have much doubt as

to where he had gone ; and Archie Findlay shook his head gravely as he discussed the matter with Singleton, Wallace, and two or three more of his companions in the mess-room, on the forenoon of the same day. His view was supported by Guido di Gargano, a young Sicilian nobleman, who had become very intimate with the officers of the regiment.

"I wish," he said to the sub who had detailed the above particulars to him, "that Wood had consulted me, or Di Saffi, or some other Sicilian, before he undertook this adventure. As for the lady, she is just the most notorious coquette in Palermo; and is, moreover, engaged to be married to Jerome di Ruspini, the nephew of the Cardinal di Brogni. To do her justice, I do not believe that she had any idea that Frank would really venture on anything so wild and dangerous, or she would have warned him seriously against it. I know the country between Palermo and the Count di Pisani's castle. It is not merely mountainous, but full of gorges and precipices; among which a man is likely to lose both his way and his life, unless he knows the neighbourhood thoroughly. It is infested by banditti too, who misuse and pillage travellers without mercy. A large party of foreigners—Austrians I think—were robbed, and many of them murdered there a few months ago. I hope Wood has *not* taken much money with him."

"I am afraid from what his servant says that he has," observed Preston; "and, what is worse, I am told that the captain of these fellows, Giuseppe di Something, has been brought into Palermo this morning in irons. If Frank falls into the clutches of his men, they may revenge their leader's capture on him."

Singleton, who was much attached to Wood, was a good deal discomposed by this intelligence.

"Do you think the case is so very serious, Guido?" he asked.

"Well," said Gargano, "the best chance is, that Wood will see the folly of his enterprise in time, and turn back."

"He is not very likely to do that," I am afraid, said Singleton. "The danger would probably have no other effect than that of inducing him to persist. But, seriously, what would happen, if he should fall into the hands of these brigands? Would it be anything worse than detention for a short time, until a ransom had been paid for him?"

"That depends on whether resistance was offered or not," returned Guido. "Our Sicilian brigands are more revengeful, and less avaricious, than their Italian brethren. I believe that what Preston says is true, and that their leader and the chief men of his band have been captured: in which case, their strength

probable that the prisoner would be murdered before he could be recovered, if this were attempted.

"Yes," said Singleton; "and besides that, General ——, though he might be induced to make such a request to the Government, would probably cashier Frank as soon as he returned. He has several times issued peremptory orders to us, to avoid everything that would be likely to bring us into collision with the authorities; and he would have no mercy on a freak of this kind. Unless things come to the worst, I shouldn't advise that to be done. Can you suggest anything else, Guido?"

"Well," said the Sicilian, "you might send an agent to treat with these bandits, if our friend has really fallen into their hands. There are fellows in Palermo, no doubt, who thoroughly understand their ways, and know the country as well as the robbers themselves. They would be faithful enough too, in fulfilling whatever they undertook. They are mostly old soldiers, who have been employed against these robbers, and have now retired from service. I could find you a suitable emissary, I have no doubt, though it would take some time to do so. You would, of course, be prepared to pay down a considerable sum; for which he would endeavour to procure Frank's liberation?"

"Of course," said Hume, "we should be ready to

pay any sum he might demand, if it were in our power to raise it ; and I really think, Gargano, that no time should be lost in finding such a person as you speak of."

The Sicilian expressed his willingness to comply ; and the party was on the point of breaking up, when Singleton's servant entered and delivered a note to his master. The latter glanced at the handwriting, and then tore the paper eagerly open.

"Who brought this, Dobson?" he exclaimed. "Send him up ; I want to speak to him."

"I do not know who brought it," replied Dobson. "I found it lying on the table in my room, as though it had been thrown through the window. It may have lain there for some time, for anything I can tell."

"Who is it from?" asked Miles, a lieutenant belonging to H.M.S. *Terpsichore* ; who, as well as his brother lieutenant, was an intimate friend of Wood's.

"It is from Frank himself," answered Singleton, "and contains only half a dozen words ; but it looks ugly, I am afraid. Here it is—written apparently on a leaf out of a pocket-book with a pencil :—

"'The Casa d'Aquila.

'I want your help. Come at once.

'F. W.'"

"The Casa d'Aquila. That is one of the inns,

Gargano, of which you were telling us, I suppose?"

"Most probably," said Gargano. "Only I can't understand what danger he can be in there. If they did not rob him of his money and murder him last night, he would be free, I should think, to leave the inn this morning. They would scarcely dare to detain him."

"Well, in any case," said Preston, "we ought to go to his assistance without delay. Who will volunteer for the service?"

All present—there were seven of them, I think, besides Gargano—at once declared their readiness to join the party.

"Can you get us a guide in an hour or so?" asked Singleton.

"Yes, I make no doubt that I could," returned the Sicilian. "But I tell you what will be better. My friend Montalba commands the Carabineers, who are well used to this sort of thing. I will ask him to let us have a dozen of his best men. A gold piece or two will fully satisfy them for their services. In fact, they would rather enjoy the adventure than not."

This offer was thankfully accepted; and in less than two hours a party of twenty had left Palermo. It consisted of Singleton, Hume, Wallace, Findlay, a

young ensign named Farmer, Preston, and Miles. Gargano, with Di Saffi, an officer of Carabineers, and a dozen of his men, completed the number. They pushed on with all possible speed, and in an hour and a half reached an inn at the foot of the mountains, where they left their horses. Here they were informed that a foreign gentleman, whose appearance tallied closely with that of Wood, had rested for an hour, and taken some refreshment about noon on the day previous. After paying for his luncheon, he had resumed his journey.

"Did he set off alone?" inquired Guido.

"Yes; the other gentleman did not leave for a quarter of an hour afterwards."

"The other gentleman? What other gentleman?"

"A gentleman a year or two older than the Inglese," the host thought. "He did not know his name, or his face; but he guessed him to be an Italian. He had his servant with him."

"Was there an inn called the Casa d'Aquila in that neighbourhood?"

"Not that he knew of; but there was an inn some-way up the mountains, which the country people called by all kinds of strange names. One of these might be the Casa d'Aquila, for anything he knew to the contrary."

"Is it far from hence?" asked Guido.

"About two miles," was the answer.

"Preston," said Gargano, taking him apart "I don't like the look of things at that inn. One of the waiters just now produced, evidently unintentionally, a whole handful of English gold ; which he thrust back into his pocket in a very embarrassed manner, as soon as he saw it. The landlord's story about this Italian gentleman and his servant seems to me a ruse to throw suspicion on a wrong scent, in the event of our not being able to find poor Frank. However, we shall do more wisely to proceed to this mountain inn in the first instance, and the plan I would suggest is this. You had better go first—you are all in plain clothes, and your appearance will not excite alarm—while we will follow cautiously behind. When you reach the inn—which you cannot mistake, as it is, it seems, the only house to be seen for miles in either direction—walk straight in, and call for refreshment. Take care to keep all the inmates employed. We will surround the house, and as soon as this has been done, a gun shall be fired to give you notice. When you hear it, seize all present, and prevent them from leaving the room. We shall thus be enabled to search the premises at our leisure ; and if Frank is there, dead or alive, we cannot fail to find him.

This plan was at once put into execution. The

Englishmen, assuming as much as possible the appearance of pedestrians on a tour, proceeded in groups of two or three along the road, reaching the inn in something less than an hour. It was a low-browed and villanous-looking structure, Harry told me, as he had ever beheld ; the walls massive, though of the rudest materials ; the windows crossed by bars in every direction, so that escape from them would be impossible ; the doors solid, and studded with iron nails. It looked just the place in which deeds of murder and violence would be wrought without fear or mercy. Preston shuddered as he thought what might have befallen his poor friend beneath its roof.

The prospect was but little mended when they entered. The whole of the lower story was occupied by one large chamber ; in the corner of which appeared a wooden staircase, by which the sleeping apartments were reached. There was a large fireplace, in front of which an old woman was engaged in preparing some articles of food for supper. Two men, each more sinister-looking than the other, were seated in the chimney corner. One of them apparently had been dozing over the fire ; for he started up as the party entered, his countenance exhibiting, as they fancied, both surprise and confusion. The other man,—the left side of whose face was disfigured by a huge scar, and who, as they afterwards learned, was the ostler of the

inn,—hastily thrust something into his vest, and would have left the house, if they had not prevented him by desiring him to fetch them something to drink. A boy, engaged on some domestic work in the furthest corner, completed the group.

Carrying out Gargano's instructions, Singleton and Hume lounged in the doorway, so as to prevent all egress ; while the others, drawing round the fire, commenced a conversation with the host, as well as their knowledge of Sicilian would allow.

"You have a lonely situation here among the mountains, mine host," began Wallace.

"True, Signor," replied the host. "It is seldom that so many noble gentlemen honour us with their presence."

"I wonder it can repay you to keep an inn in so solitary a spot."

"Nay, with the blessing of the Virgin, it is not altogether solitary. This is the only road by which travellers can cross the mountains, and few pass our door without stopping to take rest and refreshment."

"Have you had many visitors of late?"

"Not many of note, Signor. The Count di Pisani's train rested here on their way to his castle the day before yesterday, and to-day the Abbot of San Giovanni and four of his monks took their morning refecton with us."



"And you had no visitors yesterday, then?"

"Only a few peasants," returned the landlord, with an uneasy glance. "Wherefore do you ask?"

"Nothing but curiosity, my host. How is this inn called, if I may ask? We saw no sign as we came up. You see I like to ask questions."

"It is known as the Cavallo d'Oro to the inhabitants of Palermo; the peasants call it by a different name."

"Do they ever call it the Casa d'Aquila?" inquired young Farmer, interposing, not very wisely, I am afraid; but his uneasiness about poor Wood was increasing every moment, and he could no longer repress it.

A look of astonishment appeared for a moment on the landlord's features. The ostler also, who had been engaged in supplying the requirements of the guests, started so suddenly as to throw down the tray he was carrying. Before any answer could be returned however, the gun was heard outside, and the officers immediately collared the landlord and his two assistants: who offered no resistance,—which indeed would have been obviously useless, as their assailants were two to one, and well armed, while they were entirely defenceless.

Planting his sentinels so as to prevent the possibility of any one's leaving the house, and committing the

custody of the prisoners to four carabineers, Guido proceeded to make an examination of the rooms upstairs. But after the closest search no trace of Frank or, indeed, of any other guest, could be discovered. The rooms were almost bare of furniture and clothing ; and what little there was, belonged evidently to the owners of the house. The walls, ceilings, and floors, were then minutely scrutinized, to ascertain whether they contained any concealed closets or trap-doors ; but here also the search proved wholly ineffectual. The stables and out-buildings were next investigated, still with the same result. Either Wood had never visited the house at all, or else all trace of him had been successfully removed.

The party returned discomfited to the room on the ground floor. It now only remained to interrogate, and search the persons of, the landlord and his servants. It was a suspicious circumstance, they thought, that the host should have denied having seen either Frank or the other gentleman ; who, it appeared, had pursued the same road about a quarter of an hour after him. It was unlikely that, in so solitary a spot, travellers so remarkable in appearance should have passed unnoticed, even supposing that they did not stop for rest or refreshment. Nor had the embarrassment of the landlord and his servants, when they heard the inquiry respecting the "Casa d'Aquila," escaped notice.

Suspicion was greatly increased when, on examining the clothes of the prisoners,—a process to which the landlord quietly submitted, but which was angrily resisted by the ostler,—there was discovered hidden in the vest of the latter a pistol, which Findlay instantly recognized as being poor Wood's property.

"I know 't!" he exclaimed,—“I know 't as weel as I know my ain face in the meeror! I saw't sticking in Frank's belt only yester morning. I'll just take my Bible aith of it.”

The matter now assumed a still graver aspect. Preston told me that a chilling sensation of horror crept over him, and he believed over others of the party, as this souvenir of their unfortunate friend came to light. All the inmates of the inn were subjected to a separate and searching cross-examination, but nothing was elicited. The landlord and his servants persisted in their original assertion—that they had never seen Wood or the Italian gentleman or his servant; nor could any discrepancy be detected in their answers. Had it not been for the notoriously bad character attached to these roadside cabarets, and the unanswerable evidence of the pistol, their interrogators would have believed them to be speaking the truth. When pressed to account for the possession of the article above-named, the ostler, Jacopo, declared, though with manifest reluctance, that he had found

it early that morning lying by the roadside, and had picked it up, not knowing to whom it belonged.

"Lying by the roadside!" exclaimed Saffi, who, as has been already explained, was the officer of Carabineers. "And at what part of the road? Near this spot, or at what distance from it? Answer, or you know the consequences."

The ostler *did* know the "consequences" of refusing to answer Saffi's question, though the English officers did not. The prospect of having brimstone matches lighted between his fingers, or a whipcord strained by a tourniquet round his forehead, so far prevailed over his reluctance to speak, that his questioners elicited drop by drop the confession—whether true or not was another matter—that he had found the pistol in a sequestered nook among the mountains known as the "Casa d'Aquila," and forming part of the pass called the Collo di Gigante.

"The Collo di Gigante!" exclaimed Saffi. "Why that is the spot where the Austrians were attacked by the brigands, was it not?"

Jacopo did not know. It might have been, for anything he could say. He knew nothing of the brigands, not he! The saints knew he did not!

"But you know your way to the Casa d'Aquila," interposed Gargano; "and you will conduct us thither

forthwith, if you do not want to have a bullet in your brain !”

Giving him in charge to two of the soldiers, Gargano once more conferred with us. “I suspect, after all,” said he, “that Wood has been captured by the brigands ; with whom in all likelihood this fellow is in league. It is not unlikely that the note received by Singleton was allowed to reach your hands, in order that more of you may fall into their clutches. Possibly they wish to secure a number of British officers as hostages for the life of Giuseppe Naldi ; and think that though the safety of one officer could not be held of sufficient consequence to procure a remission of his sentence, that of several would. If this is their scheme, they will be taken in their own trap. Three or four of you had better go straight to the Casa d’ Aquila, with Jacopo as a guide, while our fellows will secure the passes, and come upon them while they are busy in capturing you. Several of the carabineers, though they do not know the particular spot called the Casa d’Aquila, are well acquainted with the haunts of these bandits, and are tolerably safe to do their work thoroughly. Of course there is risk in this. But it is the best, if not the only, chance of saving our friend. What do you say ? Are you willing to undertake it ?”

A very general assent was returned, and four of the officers—Hume, Preston, Singleton, and Miles—im-

mediately volunteered for the service. There was no time to lose, for the afternoon was now far advanced. Placing Jacopo therefore between Hume and Singleton, they set out : having first called the ostler's attention to the fact that the two officers on each side of him were walking with their dirks drawn, and Preston following immediately behind him, carrying a loaded pistol ; which he would fire into the back of his skull the first moment he saw reason to suspect treachery. Jacopo, who it was evident was already reduced to a condition of the most abject terror, appeared fully to appreciate these arrangements, and the quintette proceeded at a rapid walk, the others following cautiously in the rear.

The direction in which Jacopo set out was the opposite to that which they had expected. He proceeded for a quarter of a mile or so down the road by which the party had reached the cabaret ; and then, turning to the right, ascended a track which seemed at first sight the dry bed of a waterfall. After clambering up this for two or three hundred feet, Preston and his companions found themselves in a narrow ravine, which wound its way between two precipitous masses of rock. This they followed for perhaps a quarter of a mile ; when the path gradually grew wider, terminating at last in a wood of cork trees, with which the side of the mountain in that part was covered.

Here the guide implored them to stop for a few moments, and listen to what he had to tell them.

"We are at no great distance now," he said, "from the Casa d'Aquila, and I will conduct you thither if you insist on it. But I warn you that you run a great risk in venturing thither."

"You mean, that it is a favourite haunt of the brigands, I suppose?" observed Hume.

"No," returned the man. "The danger is of a different kind altogether. Pray do not question me, noble signors; I dare not answer you. But if you will take my earnest advice, you will turn back."

This of course was not to be thought of; and Jacopo was compelled, though sorely against his will, to resume his journey. They had proceeded for two or three hundred yards through the cork wood, when a noise of firing was heard at no great distance, which was replied to from several quarters—the mountain echoes repeating the sounds until they died off in the distance. The guide again paused, and fairly fell on his knees with terror, imploring his companions to return before worse came of it. But it would have been too late to comply with this advice, even had they been inclined to do so. The firing continued to increase in rapidity, while its circuit gradually diminished. A sharp encounter was evidently taking place, and seemed to be nearing the spot where they

stood. Presently, voices were heard close at hand, and ten or twelve stout fellows, in the picturesque Sicilian costume, were seen hurrying in confusion to the cover of the cork trees, pursued by the carabinieri; who fired continually, as they drove them from one point of vantage to another. Several of the brigands, for such they clearly were, had received severe gunshot wounds, and could hardly drag themselves along, leaning for support on the long barrels of their guns. As they approached Preston and his companions, the latter levelled their pistols, and shouted to them to surrender. This completed the discomfiture of the robbers. They had been taken entirely by surprise: and finding themselves surrounded on all sides, and at the mercy of their antagonists, they threw down their arms and called for quarter. Saffi and his carabinieri, accompanied by Gargano and the others, soon came up; and the whole band, eleven in number, were secured and carried off to the Cavallo d'Oro; whence they were transported a few hours afterwards to Palermo.

Meanwhile Gargano and the others resolved still to proceed to the Casa d'Aquila, where they hoped to gain some tidings or find some trace of their friend. The guide's alarm did not appear to be in any way abated by the removal of the brigands from the scene; and it was only by repeated threats that they

compelled him to go on. In a few minutes they reached a remarkable hollow among the mountains, at which several paths converged, and which Jacopo assured them was the veritable spot of which they were in search. It was a curious flat piece of rock, perhaps twenty yards square, and shut in by precipitous cliffs in every part, except where the ravines intersected them.

"This is the Casa d'Aquila, is it?" said Gargano, who had now joined himself, as the reader has heard, to the company. "Now show us the spot where you found the pistol. We must examine the ground as quickly as possible, and then return to learn what information can be gathered from the brigands. There can be little doubt that he has fallen into their hands."

Shaking with some strange terror, Jacopo had at first seemed on the point of refusing to comply; but on hearing Gargano's suggestion that they should quit the place as soon as they had examined it, his mood changed, and he pointed out a spot at the further end of the plateau. Thither they hurried, and found a terrible confirmation of their fears. The white limestone surface was deeply stained with what was evidently human blood: and which had as clearly been recently shed; notwithstanding that the burning heat of the sun had dried it everywhere, except in



the deep crevices, where it still stood in curdled pools. Similar patches here and there marked the way to one of the paths, which ran in an opposite direction to that, whereby they had entered. The idea at once occurred to several of the party that Wood had been assassinated at this spot; and his body having been dragged to the edge of the underwood which fringed the path, had been there concealed. Following the track, they examined the neighbourhood of the spot where the patches seemed to terminate; but a moment's glance showed them that their quest was vain. The rock at that point sank almost precipitously down to a depth, which could not be distinguished. A heavy stone flung over the edge returned no sound for a considerable time, and then a faint plunge announced that it had fallen into water. It was plainly useless to persevere. The sole result of the search was the discovery of poor Frank's pocket-book, lying close to the edge of the precipice, caught apparently in the underwood. With this sad memento of their friend they returned to Palermo, to ascertain what might have been disclosed by the prisoners who had preceded them thither.

Jacopo was set free, and rewarded with a piece of gold; as had been agreed upon, in the event of his conducting the party safely to the spot required. Some of the party, Preston said, were half inclined

to accompany the *douceur* with a piece of lead also. But, he added, for his part he fully believed the man to be innocent of any design against Wood, as well as ignorant of his fate. The brigands alone, he thought, could throw a light on the subject.

"And what did they confess, Uncle Hartopp?" asked several eager voices.

"A great many crimes, I have no doubt," replied the narrator, "enough at all events to justify their sentence, though that was a pretty severe one; but nothing at all as regarded Frank Wood."

"Nothing at all?" exclaimed Richard.

"No, nothing at all. You may be sure it was not the fault of the English officers. Every possible effort was made to induce the brigands to tell what they knew. Sufficient interest was even made to procure a promise of mitigation of sentence to any one who would reveal the secret. But it was useless. They died, declaring to the last that they had never seen or heard anything of the missing Englishman."

"And were they believed?" asked Archie.

At first not at all (answered Uncle Henry). But a circumstance which came to light a few days afterwards gained some credit for their story. It was reported all over Palermo (and it was soon ascertained, truly) that the Signorina Lucia di Pisani,—with whom, as doubtless you will remember, Frank had been so

deeply in love, had disappeared—no one knew whither. By some it was said that her father, offended at her flirtation with an English heretic, had immured her in a convent in some foreign country; whither she had been conveyed by night in a Genoese merchantman. By others it was stated that Cardinal di Brogni had demanded, on behalf of his nephew, that this step should be taken. Others again, affirmed that Lucia had died of a broken heart on hearing of Wood's assassination, and had been secretly buried. A fourth party declared, with equal confidence, that the lovers had eloped together, escaping safely in a speronare to Malta, and thence to England. An examination of Frank's quarters made by the police, rather tended to encourage this idea. The contents of his writing-desk proved that the flirtation with the Signorina di Pisani had proceeded much further than any of his friends had imagined. A note from her was found, dated the day before his departure, consenting to immediate flight, and appointing the Casa d'Aquila as the place of their rendezvous. It was evident that he had gone out on the day of his disappearance for the purpose of keeping that appointment. Nor was there anything to show that the lovers had not met; and, if such meeting had taken place, that they had not eloped together. It was clearly proved that a vessel had departed that morning for

the nearest sea-coast, and that its place of destination was wholly unknown. What more probable, than that Lucia and her English lover were on board of her? The popular curiosity on the subject attained at last so great a height, that the English commander-in-chief was induced to pay a visit to the castle of Count Pisani, and inquire whether he was able to throw any light on the mysterious transaction, which had agitated all Palermo so profoundly. But the count—a jealous champion of the dignity and privileges of the old Sicilian *noblesse*—though he received his distinguished visitor with the most polished courtesy, declined in a very decided manner to enter on the circumstances to which the visit referred.

“Public curiosity,” he said, “might employ itself upon his family affairs, but it would receive no help or countenance from him. For the rest, if any one assailed his personal honour, he knew how to defend it.”

With this reply General —— was obliged to take his departure; not having obtained the slightest clue to the mystery which he sought to unravel. Week after week went by. Orders arrived for the despatch of troops to Italy; and the ——th regiment quitted Palermo, leaving the strange fate of Francis Wood as much a problem as ever.

There were, in fact, four theories afloat; each of

which had its own knot of determined partisans. The first affirmed, that poor Frank had either been assassinated at one of the two inns, or else followed by their occupants to the Casa d'Aquila; where he had been murdered, and his corpse flung over the precipice into the subterraneous pool beneath it. A second party declared, with equal confidence, that he had been surprised by the brigands at the place of his rendezvous with Lucia, and offering an unwise but resolute resistance, had met his fate at their hands. The denial of the deed by the latter was held to be of little account. Several of the band were still at large; and it was well known that the bandits could rarely be induced to disclose anything which might be injurious to their comrades. Nor could it be ascertained what might have been revealed, under the seal of confession, to the priests who attended their last moments.

A third theory insisted much on the circumstance, that another traveller, accompanied by a person who seemed to be his servant, had followed closely on the young officer's track; but had never, according to the landlord's statement, reached the Cavallo d'Oro, or indeed been heard of again, notwithstanding that every effort had been made to trace him out. If there had been nothing suspicious about these persons, it was argued, they would volun-

tarily have come forward, and given an account of their movements; for considering the noise which the affair had made, it was hardly possible that they could have heard nothing respecting it. It was conjectured that the men were persons of bad character, of whom Palermo contained more than its fair share—that they had learned that poor Frank had taken with him a large sum in gold, as was plainly proved to have been the case—and that they had overtaken and slain him somewhere between the foot of the mountain and the Cavallo d'Oro. But the upholders of the first opinion pointed out, that this theory did not account for the note to Singleton, nor for the pistol found on the ostler; and further, that the very existence of the Italian gentleman and his servant was problematical. No one professed to have seen them, but the landlord and ostler of the lower inn; and they declared that they could give no description of them.

The last of the four notions was, that Frank had met the lady, according to appointment, at the Casa d'Aquila, whence they had effected their elopement. According to this view, the note addressed to Singleton had been written early in the day, when Frank found that he should require the assistance of one of his comrades in carrying off Lucia; but did not imply that he was in any personal danger. The delivery of it had been delayed

so long, that he had been obliged to make the attempt unaided ; but had nevertheless succeeded. With regard to the blood found at the Casa d'Aquila, it was surmised to be that of some other victim : the ruthless deeds of the brigands rendering this highly probable. As for the pistol and note-book, neither of which exhibited any traces of blood, they might have been dropped in the hurry of flight, or perhaps left on the ground in order to mislead pursuit. On the whole, this last idea found the largest number of supporters in the regiment. Frank Wood was notorious for alighting on his legs, into whatever scrape he might get : and his companions could not bring themselves to believe that any fatal evil had really befallen him. They affirmed that Frank was certainly living in some very pleasant nook or corner of the earth, with his inamorata, in the full enjoyment of connubial bliss ; and that in a year or two, when her papa had relented, he would return to Palermo, and be created a Sicilian nobleman, and succeed in due course of time to the Pisani estates, like a lucky dog as he had always been. These *couleur de rose* visions however faded gradually into a soberer tint as year after year went by ; and at last, whenever Frank's name was mentioned, it was with an ominous shake of the head, and a prediction that nothing more would be heard of him, or the fair Lucia, again.

This prophecy however was not destined to be

fulfilled. Several years afterwards, when the island of Corfu was occupied by British troops, the regiment into which Singleton had exchanged was ordered thither. Shortly after his arrival, whom should he encounter at one of the public balls, but the lady herself—the veritable Lucia di Pisani! He could not be mistaken in her person; and besides, the gentleman at whose house he was quartered informed him that she was the daughter of a Sicilian nobleman of rank, residing on the Pisani estate; and further, that she had been for several years a widow, though he could not remember what had been her husband's name. Singleton was grieved at the intelligence; but resolved at least to ascertain the truth. He obtained an introduction to her; and, after some desultory conversation, began to speak of Palermo, and the period of his stay there in the spring of 1806. He found her as willing as himself to talk on the subject; and when he mentioned the number of the regiment to which he had then belonged, she asked him, with eager interest, if he had been acquainted with Signor Francis Wood, a subaltern in that corps; and if so, could he tell her what had become of him? Utterly confounded at this question, Singleton could only reply, that he had been in hopes she could supply him with that information, and that had been his reason for introducing the subject. Her agitation now became so palpable, that he urged her to break

off the conversation ; but this she would not consent to do. Rising and desiring him to give her his arm, she conducted him to a private apartment, where they were secure from interruption : and then entertained him to detail the whole particulars of the young ensign's disappearance—of which, until then, she said, she had been entirely ignorant. Singleton was obliged to comply ; though he could perceive that the recital alarmed and shocked her beyond expression. She assured him that she had never made any appointment to meet Signor Wood at the Casa d'Aquila, nor had any communication with him since the day she quitted Palermo. She was proceeding to add something further ; when the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a friar, who, as Singleton afterwards learned, was her confessor. With a grave salutation to him, the ecclesiastic addressed a few words to Lucia in some language which Singleton did not understand. She immediately rose, and casting on him a look in which grief and alarm were mingled, took the friar's arm. Singleton never could obtain admission to her presence again, and the mystery of his unhappy friend's disappearance remained as impenetrable as ever.

“ And was that all, Uncle Henry ? ” inquired Archie, as the speaker paused. “ You don't mean that no one ever found out what had become of Uncle Frank ! ”

"No, I am sure he doesn't," observed Selina. "I can see that he knows, though he makes believe that he doesn't. Do tell us, please."

"Well," resumed Mr. Hartopp, "your penetration, for once is not at fault, Miss Selina. The truth did come to light, and in a most unexpected manner. You remember that among Wood's cronies, there was one Harry Preston, a lieutenant in the navy. Well, about ten years after Frank's disappearance, Harry, who had by that time risen to be captain of a man-of-war, was one of the officers despatched in Lord Exmouth's squadron against Algiers. The Algerines in those days were little better than a gang of corsairs; who seized all Europeans on whom they could lay their hands, and detained them in captivity unless they could pay a heavy ransom. It was nothing less than waging a continued and most savage warfare on all the Governments of Europe; and it is a great wonder that they were suffered to continue their depredations so long with impunity. But no sooner had the wars which had devastated the continent, been terminated by the exile of Napoleon to St. Helena, than the British Government, in conjunction with the Dutch, resolved to send a force which should be strong enough to put down the system for ever. I have no doubt you have heard of the terrible bombardment which the combined fleets maintained; until, one after another,

the Algerine batteries were silenced, and the Dey submitted at last to the over-mastering valour of his assailants.

Preston was one of the officers, whom Lord Exmouth despatched to arrange the terms of surrender with the Dey's ministers. As he was proceeding with his boat's crew through the narrow streets of Algiers—crowded with mosques, bazaars, mean shops, and palaces, all jostled together in the wild disorder of a Mahometan town—he all of a moment heard a voice, which he half fancied was familiar to him, which exclaimed almost in his ear, "Harry Preston, or I'll forfeit my head!" He stopped and looked round him. A strange motley crowd was pressing round the Europeans, with a curiosity equal to that of their visitors. There were Bedouins, bareheaded, with their loose garments folded round them; marabouts and beggars; women muffled in their bournouses; Turks by hundreds, with their turbans surmounted with the scarlet fez—which of all that throng had addressed those words to him? While he hesitated he again heard the voice, and perceived that it proceeded from a man in the ordinary tunic, turban, and scarlet drawers of crimson serge, worn by Moorish slaves, and having a silver collar round his neck. Captain Preston looked earnestly at the speaker's face. It was burnt to a deep umber by long exposure to a scorching sun, and marked by lines

which told of hardship and toil, but it was not the face of a stranger.

"We have met before, my friend," he said, after a moment's scrutiny.

"We have," was thereply, "but under circumstances very different. Deliver me from this hateful den, and send me on board your ship without delay, or I shall even now by some infernal device be carried off into captivity elsewhere. Do not hesitate, Harry, I entreat you; I am your old friend, Francis Wood."

"By Heavens, and so you are," exclaimed Preston, starting. "I remember your face, strangely as it is altered. Make your mind easy now: you are in perfect safety."

Turning to his boatswain, he gave him a few directions; and in ten minutes more Wood was on board the long boat, on his way to the man-of-war under Preston's command. Here he was relieved of his collar by the ship's armourer, and provided with suitable clothing from the captain's wardrobe. When Harry returned on board, a few hours afterwards, he hardly recognized in the well-dressed gentleman before him, the bizarre figure which he had encountered in the streets of Algiers.

"Harry, my dear fellow," said Frank, "I have a strange story to tell you, and one which I never thought to be allowed to tell to any friendly ear. But

the longest lane, they say, has its turning : and though my lane has been a pretty long one, the turning has come at last. You know, of course, that the cause of all my misfortunes has been the same which has brought men into trouble from the beginning—a woman. During our stay in Palermo I had more opportunities than any of you were acquainted with, of meeting Lucia di Pisani. I believe you thought it was only an idle flirtation, and I let you think so ; but the fact was otherwise. We were actually engaged ; and the expedition, which probably you supposed to be a mere freak on my part, was in reality undertaken with a serious purpose. We had agreed, in short, to elope together, as her father had peremptorily refused to listen to my suit."

"You were deceived in that matter, Frank," said Preston, who had heard Singleton's story. "We found the letter in your desk, which purported to have been written by the Signorina ; but it has been ascertained that she knew nothing of it. It was a forgery !"

"Ha ! was that so ?" exclaimed Wood. "I have more than once suspected it. It was a plot then throughout of those two cowardly villains ! Well, at any rate, I believed that I had received a note from Lucia, appointing the day and manner of our flight, and naming a spot called the 'Casa d'Aquila,' at no great distance from her father's



castle, as the place of rendezvous. I set off an hour after sunrise, and reached the Casa early in the afternoon. I had not arrived more than a few minutes when two men appeared on the scene ; and in the background behind them I could perceive the head of a third, who seemed to be watching their movements. I knew the first two at a glance. One of them was the Cavaliere di Ruspini, the betrothed lover of Lucia ; though, as I was at the same time aware, the object of her special dislike. The second was a servant of the Count di Pisani, whom I had often seen in attendance on his daughter. The third I did not know, but I guessed him from his appearance to be one of the peasantry of the neighbourhood."

"Was he a short fellow, with a bull neck, a slouching gait, and a huge scar on his face?" inquired Preston.

"As far as I remember, he was. Certainly, I recollect the scar, which quite disfigured him. Well, to resume—Ruspini did not leave me long in ignorance with regard to his intentions. He stalked haughtily up to me, charging me with trespassing on the Count Pisani's property, and desiring me immediately to quit it, by a path which he pointed out. I answered hotly enough, I have no doubt. But where two men are equally anxious to quarrel, it matters little what they say. Ruspini demanded an immediate meeting ; offering to lead the way to a suitable spot for the

purpose, by the same path which he had already intimated. Knowing however the treachery often lurking under these challenges, I resolved not to fight without the presence of a friend; and after some altercation it was agreed that we should meet at the same spot at sunrise on the following morning. It still wanted nearly an hour to the time named by Lucia for our rendezvous. I resolved therefore to withdraw at once, and find some messenger to convey a note to Singleton, requesting his immediate presence. By this step also I hoped to be rid of Ruspini. It was however a considerable distance to the inn at the foot of the mountains; and I was doubtful whether I could reach it and return to the Casa in time to keep my appointment. Just then I recollected the man with the scar, who might still, I thought, be in the neighbourhood. Looking round me, I saw him at some distance behind, in conversation with Ruspini's servant; who, it appeared, had now discovered his presence. In a minute or two he came towards me in great haste and alarm.

"My friend," said I, stopping him as he came up, "can you do me a great service, for which I will requite you with a gold piece?"

"Signor," he replied, "I dare not return to the Casa d'Aquila, if you would give me your hat filled with gold pieces. I have been threatened by Count

Pisani's equerry with his master's vengeance if I approach the spot for the next week to come. The Count's followers, signor, would make no more of hanging me from the nearest tree, or striking me to the heart with a stiletto, than they would of drowning a kitten."

"That accounts then for the poor fellow's fright the next day, when we made him guide us to the Casa," remarked Preston. "I never could understand that before. I never saw a man so alarmed, I think."

"I dare say," returned Frank. "Well I assured him that I did not want him to return to the Casa, or interfere in the Count's affairs. I only wanted him to take a note to a brother officer in Palermo. After much entreaty I induced him to consent; but his anxiety to be gone was so great, that I could only prevail on him to wait while I tore a page out of my pocket-book, and scribbled half a dozen words on it. I then searched in my pocket for the gold piece, but found that I had been relieved of my purse—doubtless by some of the gentry at the cabaret at the foot of the mountains, where I had rested awhile. I could only bestow one of my pistols on my friend, with an assurance that, if he performed his engagement faithfully, and brought the pistol to me, I would redeem it with a handsome reward.



"I now returned to the Casa ; but, to my great annoyance, Ruspini was still there. He was leaning over the crag, on the look-out apparently for some person. It occurred to me that he knew of the intended meeting between Lucia and myself, and I resolved at any risk to get rid of him. Angry words were soon exchanged,—then a blow. This last affront for a moment threw him off his guard, and he drew upon me. He was, I found, a better swordsman than myself ; and as he sought my life with the most deadly malignity, I should probably have been killed, if it had not chanced that his blade became entangled in my sword-belt, and I ran him through the shoulder. The wound bled profusely, and the Cavaliere's servant and myself were for a long time unable to staunch it. We had not indeed fully succeeded in doing so, when a band of ruffians, whom I at first supposed to be brigands, but afterwards ascertained to be retainers of the Count di Pisani, came hurrying up the path. A few words were exchanged between them and the servant, and then on a sudden I was seized, bound, and disarmed. In vain I resisted, and protested against the outrage, offering to pay any ransom that might be demanded. I was hurried down a narrow pass until we reached a road, where one of the rude carriages of the country was in waiting. Into this I was thrust without ceremony, three of my captors

entering with me, and two more mounting beside the driver. We proceeded at a steady pace for some hours, and at length arrived at a solitary spot on the sea coast; where a brigantine was riding at short distance from the shore, and a boat, already manned, waiting on the beach. The truth now broke upon me; I was about to be carried on board the vessel,—perhaps to be made serve as a common seaman, perhaps to be murdered as soon as we were out of sight of land. I made an earnest appeal to my guards, but without the smallest effect; in fact, I believe they really did not comprehend what I said to them. Before night I was conveyed on board, and the brigantine, immediately lifting her anchor, stood out to sea.

“And you were captured, I suppose, by one of the Algerine rovers, and conveyed to this detestable nest of corsairs; which ought to have been rooted out a hundred and fifty years ago?—that was it, I suppose?” exclaimed Preston.

“No,” returned Wood, “it was worse than that. I found on board the vessel a sailor, who could speak a few words of English. From him I learnt that the Count di Pisani and his intended son-in-law, finding that the Signorina’s infatuation (as they termed it) was not to be overcome, had resolved to carry me to Algiers, and sell me as a slave there. My arrival at

the Casa d'Aquila an hour before the appointed time had somewhat thrown them out ; but my return thither, after despatching my note, again placed me in their hands. It was in vain that I attempted to resist, or escape their designs. On my arrival at Algiers I was sold for an unusually small sum ; but on the express condition that my master was not to take any ransom in exchange for me. With diabolical cunning my vendors also affirmed (as I have only lately learned) that I was in reality an Englishman of mean extraction, without friends capable of aiding me, though I represented myself as the contrary. This plot has succeeded so well that I have languished for ten years in the most cruel captivity ; from which my encounter with you to-day in the streets of Algiers has delivered me."

"Well," exclaimed Richard, observing that Mr. Hartopp had concluded, "I hope Uncle Frank paid those two fellows off as soon as he left Algiers. I should, I know."

"Well, he couldn't pay that Ruspini off, any way," observed Charlie Marchmont. "You said he was dead, didn't you, Mr. Hartopp?"

"Yes," said the clergyman, "Lucia had been compelled to marry him (so Singleton said) after two or three years' incarceration in a Neapolitan convent. But her married life was a short one. He did not survive his nuptials a twelvemonth. I think he was killed in a duel, but I am not sure."

"And Count Pisani, uncle," asked Tom, "what became of him?"

"Why, the Count was an old man even when Frank was carried off; and by the time of his escape from Algiers, Pisani had become so feeble that it would have been impossible to require satisfaction of any kind at his hand."

"And what became of Uncle Frank at last?" asked Archie.

"Poor fellow," said the Squire. "He came to England—I remember it well—in Captain Preston's ship. He had at first some idea of visiting Corfu, and renewing his acquaintance with Lucia di Ruspini. But his constitution had been so impaired by his long residence at Algiers, that he fell into broken health, and died of decline three years afterwards. I have his silver collar in a drawer in my study still—a strange memento of a still stranger history."

CHAPTER IX.

THE all-important sixth of January arrived, and brought with it a chill north wind, with occasional sleety showers—about as miserable a specimen of a day, as any with which Dame Nature presents us throughout the whole twelve months of the year. But the joyous party assembled in the great hall at Balderscourt heeded the cold no more, than they would have done, had they been Laplanders or Esquimaux. A huge fire of logs roared in the wide chimney, round which was assembled as motley a group perhaps as ever it contained in the ancient days of Christmas mimes and mummers: when the lord of the castle in velvet and brocade sat with his stately dame by his side, to watch the gambols of wild boars and lions, and savage men—vomiting flames or reciting verses, as the case might be. It had been agreed that immediately after breakfast a dress rehearsal should be held; commencing with the song and chorus in the second scene, which was accounted the most difficult feature of the play—first, because of the necessity of getting all to sing in thorough time and tune; and secondly, because it was hard to group successfully so

large a number of very juvenile performers. It had been arranged that Tom and Ellen, who otherwise would not appear in the second scene, should perform the duet and lead the chorus. It was a piece of good fortune that they could be spared for the purpose, as they had good voices and correct ears, and were moreover accustomed to sing together. The chorus consisted of no less than nine performers, all the Underwoods and their young cousins having insisted on appearing in the pretty costumes of the Spanish peasants. Very pretty they certainly did look, as Mrs. Wood declared in the pride of her heart, when she saw them all arranged in picturesque disorder, with the broad-leaved hats, and white baskets in their hands. Even the Squire—who, sorely against his will, had been unearthed from the steward's room, in which he had taken refuge, to behold the family gathering—even the Squire relaxed at the sight of Meta's red stockings, and little Jane's blue bodice, and Alf's scarlet drawers, ornamented with festoons of ribbon. But though the little ones had so far carried the day, that they had obtained permission to appear on the stage, a strict understanding had been come to, that they were not to attempt to join in the singing. In lieu of their performance the other actors behind the scenes joined in, and produced a sufficient body of voice to constitute a very respectable chorus.

Mr. Marchmont's directions had in the main been observed ; but that particular point of them which enjoined the use of grave and sober colours in the costumes of the principal actors had, we grieve to say, been totally disregarded. Doublets and hose of scarlet and green, slashed with white satin and brodered with gold ; plumes of red and white, fur, velvet, and jewellery glittered on every side. Selina and Ellen had contrived, as girls ordinarily do on such occasions, to convert themselves into two extremely bewitching Spanish donnas ; and Uncle Hartopp, whose curiosity had so far prevailed over his laziness, as to induce him to come through the raw morning air to behold the scene, declared that they wore their mantillas as piquantly and handled their fans as dexterously, as if they had been born and bred on the other side of the Pyrenees.

"Upon my word, young ladies," he said, "it is really a pity that you should be obliged to doff those becoming robes when the play is over. I doubt your finding any fashionable dress of the present day, in which you will show to as much advantage."

"Oh but, uncle," exclaimed Selina eagerly, "we are not to change our dresses ! All the characters are to dance a character-quadrille together at the opening of the ball, and to keep the same dresses all the evening."

"What, Master Tom there, in his judge's robes and all ; and George too, in his monk's tonsure and scapu-

lary? Why you will bring terrible scandal on both Church and State! As a dutiful subject and Churchman, I must protest against it."

"No," said Selina, laughing, "you will not have your sense of propriety so far outraged, Uncle Henry. Tom is Third Peasant in the second scene, as well as Judge in the fourth. And George, though he is a Friar in the second and fourth scenes, is a Footman in the first and third."

"Such is the mutability of human things," said Mr. Hartopp. "And Tom and George choose then to be peasants and footmen rather than priests and judges? Well, they are wise—if they mean to enjoy life, at all events. But now this chorus is about to be rehearsed. Miss Fane, allow me to express my admiration of your performance."

"Oh, Mr. Hartopp, have you really read it?" returned Miss Fane, blushing a little. "I was in hopes you would have spared me. Do you know I really have no idea whether what I have said about the Spanish vines growing only on the mountains, is true or not. I had no time, you know, to find out."

"Nay, Miss Julia, you know what Waller said to Charles the Second, when he told him that his ode in praise of him was not so good as the one he had written in praise of Oliver Cromwell—'May it please your majesty, poets always succeed better in fiction

than in fact.' Therefore be easy on that score. What does it signify to the good company who will admire your performance to-night, where the grow?"

"Order, order, Henry!" exclaimed Uncle Tom who by dint of unwearied exertions had succeeded in arranging his group of peasants. "Now, Miss Julia be good enough to take your place at the piano behind the stage there, and all the chorus who are to be out of sight stand on either side of her. The Squire, Uncle Henry, and Mrs. Wood, must be audience."

After two trials the chorus was pronounced highly satisfactory. The next thing was to group the spectator guards, etc., in the final scene. This was more easily managed. The whole depth of the stage was here exhibited, and benches had been placed against the background on which the peasants and other spectators were seated. Half a dozen of Selina's favourite pupils from the National School had been fetched up to the Court, equipped in helmets and corselets from the armoury, and stationed with spears and battle-axes: their hands at various points of the stage. Banners also had been suspended from the walls, and a gorgeous canopy erected over the chair in which Tom and his coadjutors sat in state. Altogether the effect was really very striking, and even Uncle Tom expressed himself satisfied.

"Now then," he said, "we have done with you youngsters, and I must have you take off your dresses and clear the room. We must have our final rehearsal of the play itself, and you would be hopelessly in the way. Selina," he added, addressing Mrs. Wood, "I must put them under your charge, to take care that they don't come in here."

"It is just their dinner-time now," said Mrs. Wood ; "at least it will be by the time they have taken off their finery. But do you mean that they are to be kept out of the great hall all the afternoon? If so, the task will be beyond my capacity, I fear. The weather is so bitter that I can't send them out. You have got possession of their ordinary play-room ; and they must not go into the long drawing-room, or they will derange the chalked floors ; nor yet in the dining-hall, or they will fall tooth and nail on the supper. What is to be done with them?"

"I can't say," said Uncle Tom ; "but really they must not come here. Willie acts his part capitally, considering his age ; but it is a very difficult one, and he wants a little more drilling, or he may break down ; and Charlie too isn't quite perfect. We can't have them here, that's positive."

"Well," said Mrs. Wood, "then the only thing I can do is to lock them up in the day-nursery, and a nice time we shall have of it, I expect."

I must try and find something which may divert their attention, if that be possible."

It might be possible, but it was certainly not easy. There was no piano in the room, so that the resource of music, which generally succeeded in riveting Gertrude's and Ethel's attention, at all events, was unavailable. All games, puzzles, and the like were voted "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable." Miss Fane's assistance was not to be had. She and Mrs. Marchmont were busily employed in the decoration of the chandeliers with flowers from the hothouse. The case seemed well-nigh desperate. At last, by a sudden inspiration, Mrs. Wood remembered that Mr. Marchmont had returned late on the previous evening, though he had not been visible that morning. She knew well that his resources were never exhausted. Going instantly in search of him, she was fortunate enough to catch him, just as he was issuing forth to call at the Rectory. He listened compassionately to her entreaty, and followed her into the nursery. Gathering his young friends round him, he inquired what he could do to please them.

"Tell us a fairy tale!" was the universal cry.

"An Eastern fairy tale, just like the Arabian Nights," supplemented Gerty.

Mr. Marchmont bowed his head, gathered the children round him, and began—

THE RAT PRINCES.

There were once three kings, whose names were Hassan, Harran, and Haman. Their dominions were all situated near to each other, and they all three married about the same time. To Hassan were born three sons, called Malek, Melek, and Mulek; and to Harran three daughters, whose names were Selima, Solyma, and Suleimah. King Haman had six children; three sons and three daughters. But what their names were I cannot tell you, for no historian has recorded it. When the youngest princess was about seventeen years old, King Hassan paid a visit to the court of King Harran, and proposed that his three sons should marry the three daughters of his friend, supposing always that the young people should be found to like each other. King Harran, who was warmly attached to his visitor, readily consented; and the moment that the three princes were introduced to King Harran's daughters, Prince Malek was smitten with the charms of the Princess Selima; Prince Melek was no less enchanted with the Princess Solyma; while Prince Mulek conceived the most ardent affection for the Princess Suleimah. Nor were the princesses less pleased with their admirers; but all three assured their father that they were perfectly satisfied with the husbands of his choice. There

were in consequence great rejoicings throughout the dominions of both sovereigns. It was agreed that Prince Melek should be married at the court of King Hassan; Prince Mulek at that of King Harran; while the nuptials of Prince Malek, the eldest son, were to take place at a magnificent castle, which stood just on the borders of the dominions of the two sovereigns. This marriage moreover was to be celebrated the first of the three; and all three princes and princesses, as well as the principal nobles of both courts, were to be present, so that the rites might be performed with the utmost magnificence.

The rumour of this alliance soon reached the ears of King Haman, and angered him greatly. He had always intended to propose that his three sons should marry the daughters of King Harran, and his three daughters the sons of King Hassan, as soon as they had reached a marriageable age. As he was the most powerful and wealthy sovereign of the three, he had never doubted that both sovereigns would willingly listen to his overtures. He had indeed the power of compelling the obedience of either one of them, if either should refuse. But though he might have been able to overrun with his armies the territory of either King Harran or King Hassan, he was aware that the two united would in all likelihood prove more than a match for him. It was useless

therefore to think of force, and it was too late to attempt negotiation. But it was not too late to revenge what he considered to be the wrong done him ; and as he was a wicked, as well as a crafty prince, he resolved to do so without delay. He was, though no one but himself knew the fact, a skilful magician ; and no sooner had his messengers returned, confirming the tidings of the approaching marriages, than he retired to his secret cabinet, and summoned the Genie who waited on his pleasure.

"Azil," said he, "the King of the Oak Forests is about to make an alliance with the King of the Coral Coast, which displeases me. The three sons of King Hassan are about to marry the three daughters of King Harran. The marriages must be prevented. How is it to be done?"

"Oh, King of the Silver Mountains !" replied Azil, "the thing you require is difficult. The three princes are already betrothed by the most solemn engagements to the three princesses ; and they who are thus united pass under the protection of Spirits more powerful than we are. Our skill will not avail to dissolve the bond which has been contracted."

"Can you not convey the princesses to a distant region of the Earth, where the princes would never behold them again?"

"It would be of no avail," said the Genie. "The

Spirits that watch over them would convey the princes to the spot, however distant it might be."

"Could you not convey them to the caverns which lie beneath the roots of the sea?"

"The Spirits of Love could penetrate the depths of the Ocean as easily as we can," returned Aziel.

"Could you not bear them to the secret recesses of the Clouds, which no eye could discover?"

"The eyes of the Spirits can pierce their depth, as easily as thou canst look on the open landscape."

"Can you not cause them to die by sword, by poison, or by pestilence?"

"Life and death are at the disposal of the Great Spirit alone."

"Then you are utterly powerless to help me?" said King Haman, grinding his teeth as he spoke with fury.

"Not so," said Aziel; "we can change the forms of the three princesses, and place them in a spot which will baffle all discovery, unless the three princes are possessed of extraordinary courage, patience, and fidelity. And the chances are, that few mortals will be found endued with these to a sufficient extent to enable them to accomplish such a labour. But beware, O King, for if the princes should succeed in their quest, the consequences will be fatal to yourself and your family."

"So be it," said King Haman ; "rather than that these nuptials should take place, I will run every hazard."

The Genie departed, and Haman immediately summoned the commander of his armies, and desired him to collect all the forces of his kingdom, both horse and foot. "I am about," he said, "to make war against a powerful kingdom which lies near at hand : and all must be in readiness for the expedition in a week from this time."

Meanwhile the nuptials of Prince Malek with the Princess Selima were urged forward with all possible despatch. The Castle where they were to take place was furnished in the most magnificent manner ; and troops of cooks and other servants were sent thither, to provide the most sumptuous banquet that had ever been witnessed in either kingdom. Three days before that appointed for the marriage, the King of the Oak Forests set forth in a splendid procession. His chariot, which was of gold adorned with precious stones, was drawn by six cream-coloured horses. The three princes, attired as became their rank, rode behind the chariot, each mounted on a cream-coloured charger, caparisoned with velvet and silver. In this manner they proceeded through their dominions ; greeted everywhere by the acclamations of their subjects.

On the same day the King of the Coral Coast also took his departure from his Capital ; accompanied by a cavalcade, which was even more magnificent than that of King Hassan. He rode upon a white elephant, the howdah being composed of silver, with hangings of crimson satin, and surmounted with pomegranates of solid gold. The three princesses followed, borne in palanquins of pearl, inlaid with silver, and supported on the shoulders of slaves, glittering from head to foot in the most gorgeous apparel. King Harrahan, who was as much beloved by his people as his brother sovereign, received the warmest tribute of their loyalty, as the procession moved onward.

In this manner they arrived at the Castle. The first day was passed in arranging all the particulars of the approaching ceremony ; the second in feasting and revelry ; the third was appointed for the nuptials. But on the morning of the last-named day, when the attendants of the princesses came to robe them for the approaching ceremony, not one of them was to be found. The door of the chamber (for the three occupied the same apartment) was found to be fast locked, and the windows firmly secured, while the eunuchs, who guarded the door, declared that not the slightest noise had been heard in the chamber throughout the entire night. The female slaves also gave their witness that the beds had all been slept in, and

that none of the dresses or jewels belonging to the princesses were missing—nay, that their very night attire still lay by the bedsides, as though it had just been taken off. This proved that they could not have eloped with other lovers, as some of the older courtiers of both sexes had suspected. Even the old Chancellor admitted that it was morally impossible that any ladies could have eloped, and left their jewels and ball dresses behind them.

A Cabinet Council was immediately held, attended by the councillors of both kingdoms. The princes, however, were too impatient to wait for its deliberation, but held a consultation among themselves. "This is the work of some wicked Enchanter," cried Prince Melek. "All human wisdom will be of no avail."

"You are right," said Prince Melek, "our only hope will consist in asking the assistance of some powerful Magician; who may enable us to discover and break the spell by which they have been conveyed away."

"I am quite of your opinion," said Prince Mulek, "and I should tell you that I am acquainted with a Necromancer whose skill is said to be very surprising; and who has promised always to help me whenever I should require his services. He lives in a solitary tower in the heart of a forest, and few persons beside

myself know the way to his dwelling. My proposal is that we go immediately, and implore his help."

To this the other princes readily agreed, and without a moment's delay all three set forth on their journey. After encountering many dangers they reached at last the tower of the Magician ; who, on beholding Prince Mulek, received them very kindly.

"You are right," said he, when he had heard their story ; "the princesses have been transported from their father's castle, and have been changed into the likeness of some animal, by the agency of magic. But the Enchanter who has accomplished this is more powerful than I am ; and I can neither tell you the place to which they have been conveyed, nor the forms into which they have been translated. You must go to the dwelling of the Gnome who rules over the Earth, and carry with you this flower as a token from me. If they be anywhere upon dry land, or wear any shape of creatures belonging to his dominions, he will be able to tell you."

"Where does the Gnome dwell?" inquired Prince Mulek.

"In a subterranean cavern in the very heart of the Black Mountains," replied the Magician. "You must travel for a whole day, as fast as your horses can carry you. As the evening is coming on, just at sunset, you will find yourselves in front of a lofty

precipice of white stone. Strike it with this rose, and a door will open, through which you must pass. Then you must journey for some distance through a subterranean passage, after which you will find a second wall, similar to the first. Strike this also with the rose and another door will open, which will be the entrance of the Gnome's palace. But beware that you do not delay on the way : for if you reach the first door too late, it will have become so dark that you will be unable to discover the face of the precipice ; and if you remain there all night, the Evil Spirits who haunt the place will destroy you."

The three brothers expressed their thanks to the Magician, and promised to comply with his advice. Early the next morning they mounted their horses, and pursued the path through the forest. They travelled all the morning and through the hours of mid-day, without once drawing rein ; for the Magician had given them some drugs, which they mixed with their horses' food, and these gave them power to journey any distance without fatigue. But as the afternoon was drawing towards evening, they heard lamentable cries proceeding from the branch of a tree by the roadside. Looking up they saw that a monkey had been attacked by a snake, which had twisted itself round the stem of the tree, and was on the point of encircling the monkey in its folds.

"Poor little creature," said Prince Melek, "I wish we could stop to succour it."

"Can we do so," said Prince Melek, "without endangering the success of our enterprise?"

"I fear not," said Prince Melek, "but we must take the chance, come what may. Our father has taught us always to succour the helpless." So saying he sprang from his horse, which he gave to his brother to hold, and drawing his sword, advanced to the rescue of the monkey. The serpent perceiving his approach, uncoiled himself from the tree, and crept away among the bushes. Half an hour elapsed before he could discover its hiding-place, when by a blow of his scimitar he cut it in two. He then remounted, and the princes resumed their journey; but before they could set off, the monkey sprang from his seat among the branches, and lodged on the pommel of Prince Melek's saddle.

"Take me with you, noble princes," said he. "I know the danger to which you have exposed yourselves by delaying here to deliver me; but I can avert it."

They galloped on with all possible speed, in the hope of recovering their lost ground. The sun, however, had begun to disappear, before they came in sight of the precipice; and by the time they had reached it, it was so dark that they could not distin-

guish each other's faces. But the monkey put his paw into his right ear, and drew forth a small stone; which immediately emitted so brilliant a light that everything could be as clearly distinguished as if it were noonday. Prince Malek dismounted, struck the face of the precipice with the flower, and immediately a door opened in the rock, sufficiently large to admit his horse as well as himself. The two brothers followed; but the monkey called to them before they entered, and gave the youngest the magic stone, without which there would be great danger, he told them, in traversing the subterranean passage; for the latter was pitch dark, and full of outlets and crossways, leading sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left. No one who ventured into these, ever came safely out again. By the help of the talisman however, they speedily reached the second wall; which opened as the former one had done, and they found themselves in the presence of the Gnome.

He was hideous to look at, being a huge, misshapen giant, with a long dark beard, large teeth, and an eye that glowed like a burning coal. But as soon as he saw the token sent him by the Magician, he relaxed the frown which gathered over his forehead, and enquired in a gracious tone what they sought of him.

"O mighty Genie," said Prince Mulek, "know that

three lovely princesses, to whom I and my two brothers are betrothed, have been carried off from their father's castle; and no man knows by whom, or whither. The Magician, whom we consulted, has told us that it is by an Enchanter that they have been borne away, and that they no longer wear the human shape. But he cannot tell us more; and he has commanded us to seek of you the help, which he cannot render himself."

The Gnome drew his mantle over his head, and sat for several minutes in profound silence. Then he said :

"I see them not, although mine eye
Surveys all lands beneath the sky,
From deepest cave to mountain peak—
Not in my realms are they you seek."

"Alas!" exclaimed Prince Melek, as he heard this reply, "is our quest then all in vain?"

"Nay, it need not be so," replied the Gnome. "They may be in the dominions of my Sister of the Water, or my Brother of the Air. But you must seek their help, for I can be of no service to you in discovering the princesses."

"And how are we to find our way to the abodes of these Genii?" inquired Prince Melek.

"You must set off to-morrow precisely at noon," said the Giant, "and follow for two days the path that

leads along the bank of the stream rising at the foot of this mountain. Throughout the first day the stream will be no larger than a rivulet ; during the second, it will swell to a broad river ; on the third, your road will wind along the shore of the Ocean. By noon on that day you will have reached a desolate sea-coast, and will see straight before you a long strip of rock embedded in the hard sand, through which it runs for about a mile. At its extremity is a huge rock rising out of the water. Strike the farthest point of rock with this bunch of sea-weed. It will immediately sink with you, and you will find yourselves in the presence of the Genie of the Waters. But you must take especial heed that you do not loiter on the way : for the rocky path is left bare by the sea for only one quarter of an hour in the entire day ; and if you should be but one minute late, the waves would wash over you before you could reach the rock, and you would inevitably be drowned."

They rested that night in the Gnome's castle ; and the next day, after rendering him their best thanks, a second time set forth on their journey. They soon discovered the path by the brook, which continued gradually to widen throughout the afternoon, until at sunset it had increased to the size of a small river. They rose early on the following morning, and pursued the track as before. By noon the rivulet had swollen to

the dimensions of a broad and rapid stream, bearing tall ships upon its bosom ; and when they paused again at sundown, they could hear the murmur of the waves. Resuming their journey at sunrise, they traversed the shore of the sea without interruption for several hours ; when suddenly their attention was attracted to a loud screaming and scuffling, which was taking place at some little distance from the shore. Looking in the direction of the sound, they perceived that a seagull was closely pursuing a fish, which was making great, but evidently ineffectual, efforts to escape.

“ We must help the unfortunate,” said the travellers. All three reined in their steeds, while Prince Melek, dismounting, hurried to the deliverance of the fish. The seagull led him a long chase over the rocks, and it was an hour before he could succeed in overtaking it, and cutting its head off with his sword. As he was about to return to his horse, the fish entreated him to wait for a moment. “ I thank you for preserving my life,” he said, “ and I will preserve yours in return. Take this shell. Whenever you find yourself in any danger of drowning, lay it on the surface of the water, and it will instantly become a ship, large enough to convey you and your friends safe to land.”

Prince Melek now sprang again to his saddle, and he and his brothers spurred onward at the utmost

speed of their horses, trusting that they might yet arrive at the spot indicated by the Gnome within the time prescribed. But the sun had attained its meridian, while they were still at some distance from the rocky shelf; and when they at last reached it, the waves were already beginning to rise above it. Without a moment's hesitation they plunged their spurs into their horses' sides, and galloped furiously along the causeway. But they had not proceeded a third of the distance when the waters began to rise round their horses' feet, and soon all trace of the rocky path was lost. In another minute they would have been carried away by the waves; but Prince Melek, remembering the shell which the fish had given him, drew it forth from his vest and laid it on the water. In a moment it expanded into a ship sufficiently large to contain not only the princes, but their horses also. In this manner they traversed the rest of the distance which lay between them and the rock, and landed in safety upon it. Prince Melek then struck the farthest extremity with the tuft of sea-weed which the Gnome had given him. In a moment the rock sank beneath their feet, and they found themselves in a beautiful grotto, adorned with sea shells and flowers; in which sat the Genie of the Waters on a throne of pearl. As soon as she beheld them, and was presented with the token sent her by the ruler of the Earth, she

accorded to them a most favourable reception, and enquired graciously how she could serve them.

Prince Melek made the same statement to her, which his brother had already made to the Gnome of the Earth. The Genie drew her robe round her face, and sat awhile evidently engaged in contemplation. Then she said :

“I see them not, although my glance
Sweeps all the water’s wide expanse—
Fount, stream, lake, ocean, gulf, and creek—
Not in my realms are they you seek.”

“But do not be cast down,” she added, noticing the look of disappointment on Prince Melek’s face, “though they are not in my domains, nor in those of my brother of the earth, they may be in those of the Spirit of the Clouds. You must invoke his assistance, for we cannot avail you further.”

“And how are we to discover the abode of the Spirit?” inquired Prince Malek.

“You must travel hence for three days,” replied the Genie, “along a path which I will point out to you. For the first day it will cross a level plain. On the second it will lie among rocks and precipices; at the foot of which you will be obliged to leave your horses. On the third day you will have to pursue the track through masses of ice and snow. Exactly

at sunrise of the fourth morning you will find yourselves on the peak of a lofty mountain, which will appear one huge block of ice. Strike it with this fragment of ice-plant, which I now give you, and the ice will part asunder and display the dwelling of the Spirit of the Clouds. But be especially mindful not to arrive one minute after the hour of sunrise. It is only then that the clouds which envelope the summit are for a few moments dispersed, and the face of the precipice becomes visible. If you remain there, or attempt to descend, you will inevitably perish."

Prince Malek expressed his gratitude, and received the ice-plant which she held out to him. On the ensuing day the princes took leave of the Genie, and set forth in the direction which she had pointed out. Throughout the whole of that day they traversed a long dreary plain, in which there grew neither tree nor shrub. At nightfall they came to the base of a range of mountains, and found a cavern, where they left their horses. On the next day they commenced the ascent, and toiled from dawn till sunset up paths so rugged and dangerous, that nothing but the most determined courage could have enabled them to proceed. But severe as this trial had been, it was as nothing to compare with that of the day which followed. The path now lay along deep fields of snow, into which they sank at every step above the knee; or up

frozen slopes, where they had to cut out with the swords holes in the ice to enable them to plant the feet ; or again, along narrow precipices, where the slightest slip would instantly have been fatal. About noon the silence, which had hitherto reigned everywhere round them, was suddenly broken by a shrill cry ; and turning to the spot whence it proceeded they beheld a small bird vainly endeavouring to make its escape from an eagle, which was fiercely pursuing it. They were greatly tempted to leave it to its fate for their nerves were unstrung by cold and hunger and they knew that it was as much as they could do to reach the mountain-top by the time appointed. But the recollection of their father's precepts prevailed over every other consideration ; and Prince Malek, drawing an arrow from his quiver, moved cautiously along the edge of a terrible precipice, until he came to a short distance from the spot where the struggle was still proceeding. He then discharged the arrow, which pierced the breast of the eagle, and it fell lifeless into the abyss ; while the liberated bird flew to her preserver, and nestled in his bosom.

"Take this feather," she said ; "it will help you in time of need. Whenever you hold it above your head, a wind will arise from whatever quarter you may desire, and blow gently or violently at your pleasure."

The prince thanked the bird, and creeping back

carefully as he had advanced, rejoined his companions. But this delay had so interrupted their progress, that it was in vain that they endeavoured to arrive at the summit of the mountain at the hour indicated by the Genie. Sunrise overtook them while they were still far below ; and when at length they reached the peak, it was so thickly enveloped in mist, that not a trace of it could be discerned. Then the eldest prince drew forth the feather which he had received from the bird, and held it up on high. In the twinkling of an eye there arose a strong wind, which blew full on the face of the mountain, and dispersed on every side the clouds which had gathered round it. The spot described by the Genie now became distinctly visible in the rays of the sun ; and being struck by the ice-plant, the wall of ice was cleft asunder, and the Spirit of the Air was seen reposing on a pile of clouds. The errand of the princes was soon told ; and, like the others, the Genie gathered his mantle of mist round his brows, and remained absorbed in thought for several minutes before he answered—

“ I see them not, and yet my gaze
The whole domain of Cloud surveys—
Dense-rolling fog, or vapoury streak—
Not in my realms are they you seek.”

A cry of despair broke from all the princes at once.

"Alas!" exclaimed Prince Malek, "then our last hope is at an end!"

"The spell is too potent for us to break," groaned Prince Melek.

"Let us plunge headlong from this rock, and end our misery!" cried Prince Mulek.

"Be not rash," said the Spirit. "It is true that these princesses have been hidden away by some unusually powerful enchantment, yet the place of their retreat may yet be discovered. I and my brethren can only discern that which lies within the limits of our dominions; but the Sun discerns everything that passes in this world below. Unless your betrothed have passed into the regions of the dead, they cannot escape his penetrating eye. To him therefore I will send you in my chariot; and if you set out now, you will approach his palace shortly before he rises; which is the hour most favourable for an audience."

As the Spirit spoke, he waved his hand on high: and presently a little speck was seen on the verge of the horizon, which grew gradually larger and larger as it approached them; until they could perceive that it was a chariot of white vapour lined with delicate pink mist, and drawn by horses of black thundercloud. The three princes bade adieu to their ally, and took the seats assigned to them; when the sable steeds instantly sprang forward with the rapidity of the

THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE





The Cloud Chariot —p 316.



wind. They passed over a vast extent of land, and could behold forests, rivers, and cities, spread out like a map : while here and there the tops of the highest mountains appeared, but a few hundred feet beneath them. Then again the car brought them over the immeasurable realms of waters, sometimes dotted with islands, sometimes without a single speck to vary the wide expanse. Sometimes again they were lost in dense masses of cloud which hid everything from their sight, and could hear the crash of the thunder and behold the vivid flashes of lightning, as they burst forth close beside them. At length the shades of night began to gather round them ; but their winged steeds pressed on with unabated ardour. A little before the hour of sunrise they perceived that they were approaching a palace, built entirely of golden clouds and roofed with vapours which reflected every colour of the rainbow. Before the doorway hung rich curtains of crimson mist ; and the winged Hours, who are the servants of the Sun, stood in readiness to draw them aside when the moment of their master's departure should have arrived. The Golden Chariot also, with its fiery horses, awaited his approach ; for it wanted but a few moments of the time when he would commence his daily journey. The three princes sprang from their seats, and passing through the crimson curtains, found themselves in the presence of the Sun.

He had not yet assumed his crown of light ; and it was well for them that he had not, or its brilliance would have blinded their mortal vision. He did not, like the Gnomes, enquire the purpose for which they came, nor did he wrap his head in his mantle before addressing them. But instantly, in reply to their unspoken wish, he said :

• “ They are not on the land,
 They are not in the sea,
 They are not in the cloud—
 But they are in all the three.
No forms of Beasts they wear,
No shapes of Fish enthal,
Nor Birds, that wing the air—
 Their shape unites them all.
Water, land, and cloud combined
Is their dwelling—search and find.”

As he spoke these words, he threw them three rays of light, which the princes caught in their bosoms; and passing between the curtains, which were drawn aside by the attendant Hours, assumed his crown of light, and was borne away in the chariot. The princes re-entered the car which had conveyed them thus far; and the winged horses, again commencing their flight, deposited them before night at their father's capital.

They were full of perplexity at the result of this last interview. They had received a reply to the

riddle, which until now no one had been able to solve; but the reply seemed to be no less mysterious than the riddle itself had been. They entered the town in the vague hope of hearing that by some unexpected chance the princesses had been recovered. But the tidings they received only heightened their distress. They found that King Haman had taken advantage of the absence of King Hassan and King Harran from their capitals, to attack them with all his forces; and the armies of the two kings, being wholly unprepared, had been unable to offer any resistance. King Haman's eldest son had usurped the throne of the Oak Forests, and the second son that of the Coral Coast. The youngest son, they further learned, was living in great pomp and magnificence at the Castle, where the nuptials were to have taken place. As for King Hassan and King Harran, no one knew precisely where they were. It was believed that they had fled to the court of a neighbouring king; whose aid they intended to ask in re-conquering their dominions.

The three princes were overwhelmed with despair at this mournful intelligence. After a long consultation they determined on again repairing to the abode of the Magician, who had in the first instance directed them to the dwelling of the Gnome of the Earth. Having first recovered their steeds therefore, they set

out for his tower, and were received by him with the same kindness as before. He enquired with much minuteness the particulars of their several journeys, and the replies made to them by the Spirits whom they had consulted.

“The monkey, whom Prince Mulek delivered,” said he, “was the eldest son of the King of the Diamond Mines; who had been condemned to wear that shape until the serpent, his enemy, should be destroyed. The fish, whom Prince Melek rescued from the gull, was the only daughter of the Sultan of the East. She had been sought in marriage by an evil Enchanter, from whom she had vainly endeavoured to escape, until the prince destroyed him. And the bird was no less a person than the Queen of the Pearl Islands; who is obliged for one day in the year to take some shape of bird or beast. Their gifts will be of the utmost value to you in the search which you have still to make. But the most potent talismans of all which you possess, are the rays of light given you by the sun; for on whomsoever these fall, they will—if they should be under the spell of any enchantment—immediately resume their natural shape.

“I will now give you the best directions in my power; for I think I guess the secret of the enchantment, though I cannot be certain. I shall touch you all three with this wand; when you will take the forms

of rats. You must then go down to the shores of a lake, which lies in the very centre of this forest. In no other shape could you safely pass that way; for the whole neighbourhood is infested with rats so fierce and numerous, that none but their own species can escape their violence. When you have reached the bank, you must find some mode of embarking on the lake, and proceed in an easterly direction for three days and three nights. In the middle of the third night you will arrive at the only spot, which—so far as my knowledge extends—corresponds with the description given by the Sun of the place where the princesses are confined. Be careful that you do not miss this in the darkness of the night, or that your boat does not sink into the lake; for if either of these events should happen, you will fall into the power of the Enchanter, and no one will be able to deliver you." So saying he took his wand, and touching them with it, the three princes were in a moment changed into three black rats. In this shape they commenced without delay the journey described to them by the Magician. In a few hours they found themselves in the midst of a wide-spreading plain, inhabited by great multitudes of animals exactly resembling themselves in size and shape, but no other living creature was anywhere to be seen. These rats were in reality the servants of the wicked Enchanter Aziel, who guarded by their

means the approach to his domain. But Prince Malek and his brothers passed unsuspected in their disguise, and early on the following morning reached the banks of the lake. On their arrival, Prince Melek produced his shell, which he laid upon the surface of the water; and in a moment it became a boat, just large enough to contain the three rats. They stepped on board, and Prince Malek raising his feather on high, a wind from the west sprang up, and bore them rapidly through the waters. They sailed on all that day, and at nightfall could only just discern the shore from which they had embarked. On the second and third day nothing was anywhere to be seen but the expanse of waters. As the third night came on, the weather, which had hitherto been calm and bright, began to change. Black clouds gathered over the sky, which completely hid the moon; and towards midnight it became so dark, that it was impossible to distinguish any object, however near at hand. At the same time a furious tempest arose, which threatened to sink their vessel, or drive it for many miles out of its course. But Prince Mulek drew forth the stone which the monkey had given him, and so brilliant a light was emitted by it, that the whole scene became as visible as if it had been noonday. They perceived that they were close to a small island, which was so low and swampy, that it

was hard to say whether it were land or water, and which was enveloped in a perpetual mist, arising from the stagnant flood. The violent wind was bearing them rapidly towards the island—in fact they were on the very point of being carried past it. But at that moment Prince Malek again held up his feather, and a wind of equal force arose from the opposite direction, which drove the other back, so that a dead calm ensued. They could now distinctly behold the strange spot to which they had been conveyed. On its surface were to be seen three winged lizards, with crowns on their heads; which sometimes crept along the land; sometimes plunged under the water; and sometimes rose on their wings into the air. The three princes leaped ashore. They drew forth the rays of light from their bosoms, and touched the lizards with them; and at the same instant the three princesses stood in their natural form before them. The princes then resumed their own shape once more, and stepped on board Prince Melek's boat. Prince Malek raised his feather, and a favourable wind filled the sails; while Prince Mulek's stone guided them safely onward through the darkness of the night.

While these events were passing, King Hassan and King Harran had fled to the court of a neighbouring king, who had been for many years their ally. They

told him their sad story—how King Hassan had lost his three sons, and King Harran his three daughters; and how both sovereigns had been deprived of their thrones by the usurpation of King Haman. They entreated the help of their ally in this grievous affliction. But their host, who dreaded the power of the King of the Silver Mountains, not only refused to render them the support they asked, but expelled them without ceremony from his dominions. They wandered for many days through the depth of an almost impassable forest; until one evening they found themselves on the shore of a lake, which appeared to stretch out as far as the horizon extended. As they drew near the bank, they saw at a little distance a boat approaching them, in which were three princes and three princesses; and equally to their astonishment and delight, King Hassan recognised his three sons, and King Harran his three daughters. As soon as each party had heard the tale related by the other, they resolved to proceed to the court of the Queen of the Pearl Islands, and entreat her assistance. By the help of the talismans possessed by the princes, they easily reached her dominions; where the Queen welcomed them with lively gratitude, and at once promised them all the aid she could bestow. The Sultan of the East also, and the King of the Diamond Mines, hearing what had passed, sent their forces to join

those of the Queen. The three armies set forth at the same time, each commanded by one of the three princes. Prince Melek led his troops against the usurper of the kingdom of the Oak Forests ; Prince Mulek assailed the usurper of the throne of the Coral Coast ; while Prince Malek invaded the territories of King Haman himself. All three met with the most signal success. King Haman and his sons were taken by surprise, defeated, and slain. Then all the sovereigns, the princes and princesses, repaired once more to the Castle, from which the brides had been conveyed away. The nuptials were celebrated with still greater magnificence, than had been designed on the former occasion. After a whole month of feasting and enjoyment, the King of the Diamond Mines, the Sultan of the East, and the Queen of the Pearl Islands, returned to their respective dominions. Prince Melek was declared heir of the kingdom of the Oak Forests ; Prince Mulek of that of the Coral Coast ; while Prince Malek was put in possession of the sovereignty of the Silver Mountains. From that time forward nothing ever occurred to disturb the peace and prosperity of the three kingdoms.

“ Oh, mamma,” exclaimed Ethel, starting up and rushing to the window, “ here comes the orchestra

"Oh, Tom!" remonstrated his sister; "that is saying too much!"

"Not a bit," persisted Tom. "I tell you everything was first-rate. Why there was first the play. That went off without a hitch, just as if it had been done at Drury Lane or Covent Garden. How the people did applaud to be sure! They encored the chorus, and wanted it a third time even; and they cheered at the end of the second scene like mad. I heard a gentleman say afterwards, that Selina's acting in the first two scenes was as good, as good; and they were quite sorry she couldn't appear again."

"She did act very well," said Ellen. "I declare her death seemed quite real. It gave me quite a thrill when we came in, and found her lying there."

"But the last scene was the ticket," said Tom. "When it got to that last bit of acting between Philip and Archie, you might have heard the scratch of a pin all through the hall. I don't think two London first-rates would have taken the shine out of them. And when you got up in the witness-box—oh, my!" concluded Tom, wholly unable to find words wherein to express his admiration.

"Yes, I could see what an effect it produced; and they went on applauding when the curtain fell, as though they never meant to stop," observed Ellen. "But, after all, I enjoyed the ball much more. That

character quadrille, and Sir Roger de Coverly at the last, were something to remember."

"Yes, the governor came out strong there. I did not think anything would ever make him dance again. But he was so delighted at the acting, and at seeing the people so pleased, that he looked twenty years younger, I declare. When he led out old Lady Susan Clive, I think the people were as much delighted as with the play itself."

"And Uncle Tom, too; he made old Aunt Marchmont dance. I think that was almost as good fun," exclaimed Ellen.

"Yes, and Dr. Bowles and Miss Fane," shouted Tom. "Well, we shan't forget this Twelfth Night for a long time to come, any how."

Tom's description of the success of the performance, and the enthusiasm of the spectators, was perhaps a little overdrawn. But nevertheless it was true that the whole entertainment went off with signal *éclat*. The acting of the four principal performers had been highly commended, not only by partial relatives, but by some really experienced judges; and the great man of the county had given them an invitation to repeat the whole affair at his house, to which a regular theatre was attached. The Squire was too wise to allow them to accept this proposal; but he had gone so far as to declare, that if they were all alive

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and well next Twelfth Day, a similar party should be given, to which the same guests should be invited—a somewhat rash vow, of which it was not likely that the junior branches of his family would fail to remind him. Nay, in the first glow of his enthusiasm he went so far as to have several copies of the play struck off by the Ludlow printer, and presented to his guests as souvenirs of the evening. It is from one of these that the following pages are printed; and therewith we beg to take our leave of our readers, hoping that they may all enjoy the coming Christmas, as much as our young friends at Balderscourt did on the present occasion.

THE SISTERS OF SEGOVIA.

(*A Drama in Four Scenes.*)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THE SENIOR JUDGE . . .	MR. T. WOOD.
ALVARO, <i>a Retired Merchant</i> . . .	MR. C. MARCHMONT.
CALDERON, } <i>Advocates of Segovia</i> {	MR. GERALD HARTOPP.
ALONZO, } <i>Advocates of Segovia</i> {	MR. PHILIP HARTOPP.
FELIPPO, <i>a Disgraced Officer</i> . . .	MR. A. WOOD.
PEDRILLO, <i>a Dumb Youth, Nephew to</i> <i>Alvaro</i>	MASTER W. WOOD.
FATHER HUGO, <i>a Carmelite Monk</i> }	MASTER G. HARTOPP.
DIEGO, <i>Servant to Alvaro</i> }	
FIRST PEASANT	MASTER H. HARTOPP.
SECOND PEASANT	MR. T. WOOD.
CRIER	MR. R. WOOD.
DOLORES, } <i>Twin Sisters, Wards of</i> {	MISS WOOD. ,
ANTONIA, } <i>Alvaro</i> }	MISS E. WOOD.
PEASANT WOMAN	MISS G. WOOD.
Chorus of Peasants, Guards, Spectators, &c.	
PROMPTER . . .	MR. R. WOOD.

SCENE THE FIRST.

A Garden surrounding a Country Villa. In the back-ground, Mountains.

[*Enter DOLORES, from the house, with a letter.*

Dolores. Of all the insolence of which I have ever heard, this is the most outrageous. Was ever Castilian lady so insulted? It was, methought, enough that this

wretch, Felippo, should have more than once presumed to address me. But, no! He has dared to write to me, and ask me to grant him the favour of an interview! I have written him such an answer as will effectually check even his presumption. I shall get poor Pedrillo to deliver it. There is one good point about the poor lad's infirmity, at all events. He can tell no tales.

[*Enter DIEGO with a letter, which he delivers, and exit.* What, another letter? Not like the other, I hope. Ha! I declare it looks like Antonia's handwriting (*opens it eagerly*), and so it is. (*Reads*)—

"My dearest Dolores,—This to let you know that a grievous sickness has broken out in this neighbourhood; and though none of the inmates of our convent are as yet taken therewith, yet the Lady Abbess thinks that all the damsels under her charge should be sent to their homes, and that without delay, until such time as the sickness shall abate. Wherefore, I am to bid you apprise my guardian, that he expect me to-morrow. I am to cross the mountains with a suitable escort, setting forth as early as may be; so that you may expect me about the hour of Nones. Hoping that such brief notice may not discompose my guardian, to whom I pray you humbly to commend me,—I am, your loving sister, Antonia."

Oh, how delightful! I declare I'll go out to meet

her ; and I'll not tell my guardian a word about it ! It will be such a charming surprise ! Dear old guardian ; he loves us like his own children ! (*She looks at the letter again.*) Oh, here is a postscript. " You need not tell Alonzo I am coming. He will not care to know." Sly puss ! I'll punish her properly. I *won't* tell Alonzo—nor Calderon either, for the matter of that. It will be a good lesson to teach him that I can keep a secret ; which he was saucy enough to say yesterday that I could not. Here is some one coming. [*She thrusts the letter into her pocket. Enter PEDRILLO.*] It is only the poor dumb youth. By the bye, he was the very person I wished to see. Senhor Pedrillo !

[*PEDRILLO bows, and lays his hand on his heart.* I know you profess yourself my cavalier. Will you please to do me a favour ? You see this letter. It has no address, you perceive ; but I will tell you for whom it is intended.

[*PEDRILLO makes a gesture of assent.* Do you know Senhor Felippo, the ex-captain of Musqueteers ? Will you deliver it to him the first time you encounter him alone ?

[*PEDRILLO shakes his head angrily.* Foolish boy, it is not what you suspect. It is no love letter. Nay, it is to rebuke his presumption, and forbid him to approach my presence, or address word or line to me for the future. Now will you take it ?

[PEDRILLO goes down on one knee, takes the letter from her, and kisses her hand. Enter ALVARO behind.

PEDRILLO starts up, and retires in confusion.

Alvaro. So, my fair ward. I have sought you in vain through the house. Do you mean to accompany me to Segovia to-day?

Dolores. What, to see the bull-fight? No, I thank you. I think the bulls have lost all their spirit of late—and the Matadores too, for the matter of that. One might as well be in a slaughter-house, and see the beasts knocked on the head in the ordinary way of business.

Alvaro. Ah, true. I had forgotten that Calderon could not be at the theatre to-day. He and Senhor Alonzo are coming here on business this morning, and the Courts sit in the afternoon. Well, they are both fine lads, and honest too, no doubt—that is, out of their profession! But I never thought my two wards would have fancied a brace of lawyers, I confess.

Dolores. Why not, guardian? What is the matter with Senhor Calderon?

Alvaro. Matter? Nothing that I know of—(aside) except that he is as jealous and vindictive as Bluebeard himself. (Aloud) Well Dolores, if you go not to Segovia, how do you purpose to pass the day—that is, after Senhor Calderon is gone?

Dolores. Senhor Calderon's movements are nothing

to me. I had thought of taking a walk to your vineyard in the mountains. They are gathering the grapes to-day, and it is ever a pretty sight to behold.

Alvaro. To the vineyard in the mountains? Well, I have no objection. I will accompany you thither with Diego, as soon as my business with the lawyers is over.

Dolores. Do not let me interfere with your plans; I can go alone. Surely there is no danger.

Alvaro. Danger? No, I suppose not. Still, you should not walk unattended in so lonely a spot.

Dolores. Do you think so? Then I can take Pedrillo. He will be my squire, I am sure, if I ask him.

Alvaro. Yes, and so am I. Poor lad, he would be glad enough to be your squire, or your knight either, for the matter of that. When I came up just now, he looked as if he was going to ask for something of the kind.

Dolores. Oh, guardian, that is all folly. It was nothing of the sort. I marvel you can credit such nonsense.

Alvaro. Folly, nonsense, hey! Well, so it is, poor lad, no doubt—much the same kind of folly which makes a poor moth buzz about the taper, till he has singed his wings off. But the taper ought not to put

itself in the moth's way, that is my view of the matter ! Here come our friends.

[*Enter CALDERON and ALONZO.*

Calderon. Good morrow, Alvaro ; good morrow, fair Dolores. Shall we have the honour to escort you to Segovia, when our business is concluded ?

Dolores. I thank you, senhor, but I am bound elsewhere.

Calderon. Elsewhere ? Whither, I pray you ?

Alvaro. Ay, whither do you think, Senhor Calderon ? She proposes to herself a solitary walk among the mountains ! Or what think you of my nephew Pedrillo for her companion ?

Calderon (aside). Pedrillo ! Always that youngster dangling at her heels. (*Aloud*) Nay, fair Dolores, let me be your attendant, if go you must.

Dolores (haughtily). I thank you, sir ; but I need not your escort. Senhor Alonzo, may I crave a word with you ?

Alonzo. As many as you shall honour me with, fair lady.

Dolores. Have you—heard from Antonia lately ?

Alonzo. Alas, no ! not for these three weeks. Can you tell me aught of her ?

Dolores. Hem ! perhaps. Will you be my cavalier this morning ? If so, I may perchance have space to tell you somewhat of her.

Alonzo (hesitating). You do me but too much honour; yet the Senhor Alvaro hath summoned Calderon and myself hither on business, which he will scarce permit to be set aside.

Dolores. Oh, *that* need not signify. I will promise not to set out for an hour, or it may be longer.

Alonzo (still more embarrassed). And you see, Calderon—he is my friend, and I hope to be yet more nearly allied to him. I would not anger him, if it could be helped. Will you pardon me, lady fair, if I presume to counsel you?

Dolores (sharply). Oh, certainly, Senhor Alonzo, I shall be only too thankful for your counsel.

Alonzo. Well, then—if you will really so far forgive my presumption—I would advise that you go not to the mountains, or at least that you take not Pedrillo for your escort. There is bitter dislike betwixt him and Calderon. Each is furiously jealous of the other. For my own part, I deem there is no malice in the poor mute youth: but Calderon thinks otherwise. As for yourself, I know right well—

Dolores (in the same tone as before). Really, senhor, I am most deeply indebted to your charitable opinion, and your counsel also is admirable; but I am not Senhor Calderon's slave—not *yet*, at all events—and his humours are nought to me. I bid you good morning, Senhor Alonzo. (*To Calderon*) Senhor,

I have also the honour to bid *you* good morning. [Exit.]

Alvaro. So she is gone. Well, senhor, you know the proverb—As well attempt to account for the way the wind blows, as for the changes in a woman's humour. I suppose it was because I caught Master Pedrillo on his knees before her, when I came in just now. But that, you know—

Calderon. How say you? Pedrillo on his knees before her?

Alvaro. Yes; but you need think nothing of that. It is only a bit of calf-love on his part, and she doesn't care a carlino for him, as the Italians say. But I will go after her, and persuade her to give up this adventure, if I can.

[Exit. As he goes out PEDRILLO enters on the opposite side.]

Alonzo. Come, Calderon, Alvaro is right. This is but a passing cloud. She will be bright and smiling when you meet again.

Calderon (moodily). She may provoke me too far, though. I never forgive when I am wronged. But it is not her caprices that move me so much, as the favour she shows this dumb youth.

Alonzo. Pshaw! that is but sport; you heard what her guardian said. He is Pedrillo's uncle too, remember.

Calderon. I trust mine own eyes more than fifty uncles, or guardians either. The lad is handsome to look at, and, notwithstanding his infirmity, likely enough to please a girl's fancy ; and, by St. Jago, if she cannot read the language of his eyes, she is duller than any woman in Segovia. I tell you I will no longer suffer it.

[*He turns and sees PEDRILLO, who is engaged in picking a nosegay.*

See, there he is, gathering a bouquet of the flowers which he knows she most admires. Hark you, sirrah !

[*PEDRILLO looks angrily up.*

I know you understand me well enough, and therefore few words will suffice. Your attentions to Donna Dolores displease me. I say, your attentions displease me, sir ; and I desire you will forbear them, or I will find means to compel you !

[*PEDRILLO looks menacingly at him, and lays his hand on his dagger.*

Ha ! do you threaten, sirrah ?

Alonzo. Nay, Calderon, you are too hasty. It may be the poor youth does not even know of your engagement. It is a secret which has been told but to few.

Calderon. Ha ! I had forgotten that. (*To Pedrillo*) Senhor, it may be that you are not apprised that Donna Dolores del Moreno and myself are affianced lovers. If so, I crave your pardon for my remarks

just now. But now that you have learned that fact, you will see that I have a right to demand that you desist from further pursuit of her.

[PEDRILLO *stares incredulously at him ; then, with a gesture of despair, rushes out.*

I told you so, Alonzo. There is mischief in that fellow, for all his seeming simplicity. He loves Dolores, and believes his passion returned. You saw how he received my announcement. By all the saints, I hardly like to trust him with her, when he learns that I have told him the truth !

Alonzo. I cannot think so. He is in love with her : I am afraid you are right there ; but his very affection will prevent him from injuring her.

Calderon. I scarcely know that. In characters like his, the change from passionate love to deadly hate is often strangely rapid.

Alonzo. You judge the youth hardly. Anyhow, one day can signify little. You can speak to Alvaro, if you will, and bid him keep watch, or banish Pedrillo from his house. See, here the old man comes. You can bring up the subject when we have completed our business.

[*Re-enter* ALVARO.

Alvaro. Well, lads, she is gone. There was no stopping her, except by locking her up ; and that would have been no wise policy, to my mind. Crossing a woman in trifles is like stopping the spout of a tea-

kettle; there is tolerably sure to be an explosion afterwards. Well, she is gone, and we had better go to business, and think no more about it.

Calderon. Did Pedrillo go with her?

Alvaro. No; I have not seen him, nor did she ask for him. Come, senhors, to business, or we shall not have time to complete it this morning.

[Exeunt into the house.]

SCENE THE SECOND.

*A lonely pass in the Castilian mountains. FELIPPO
is discovered half-hidden by a mass of rock.*

Felippo. It is past the hour of noon, and she comes not. Surely that is strange. I distinctly overheard her saying that she purposed to walk this way; nay, I saw her set out unattended, an hour ago at least. As for my letter, I suppose she will deign no answer. Woe to her if she persist in her obduracy! She has a desperate man to deal with. I have long loved her—ay, to madness, and have sworn that, if she reject me, death alone shall be her bridegroom. And now my affairs will permit of no delay. That last throw of the dice has completely beggared me. If I wed not her money bags, I must fly the country a ruined man. Hist! I hear some one coming (*looks cautiously down the pass*). It is a woman's figure; can it be—— Pish! it is only the peasants returning to the vineyard. A murrain on them! I had better not let them see me, though.

[*He hides behind the rock. Presently, PEASANTS pass across the stage, singing.*

Chorus. The hills of Spain, the hills of Spain !
The vineclad hills of Spain !
For a scene more fair than the sunsets there
You may search through the world in vain.

Two voices. Fair are the spreading plains of France,
That smile with the vintage bowers.
And fair are the vales of her own Provence,
With the wealth of their fruit and flowers.
But ours is the home of the southern vine,
That loves not the vale, nor plain.
Oh ! the fairest land where the sunbeams
shine,
Is the mountain land of Spain !

Chorus. Oh ! the hills of Spain, &c.

Two voices. Fresh is the breath of the morning blast,
That dances along their brow.
Cool is the depth of the shades they cast
In the noontide's burning glow.
Sweetest of all is the evening hour,
When we dance, and the cup we drain.
Oh ! the fairest land, by the rainbow spanned,
Is the mountain land of Spain !

Chorus. Oh ! the hills of Spain, &c.

[*As the sounds die off in the distance, FELIPPO
comes forth from his hiding-place.*]

Felippo. There they go, and they are well out of the way. If they had been a little nearer, they might overhear what passed between Dolores and myself—that is, if the Donzella is really coming, which I begin to doubt. (*Looking down the pass*) Here she is, though, I declare. Yes, it is herself; but, ten thousand furies, she is not alone after all! There is a youth with her. Malediction on him! If he be a lover now, and especially if he be a favoured one, I would not give a maravedi for his life.

[*He hides behind the rock again. Presently enter DOLORES, PEDRILLO following.*

Dolores. Poor youth, wherefore have you followed me!

[*PEDRILLO lays hold of the hem of her robe, as if imploring her to accompany him home.*

What would you with me, Pedrillo? Alas, I fear I can guess but too truly. Alvaro was right, though I can scarce believe it even now.

[*PEDRILLO falls on his knee, and tries again to induce her to return with him.*

No, no, poor Pedrillo, I cannot be yours. Forgive me if I have unwittingly misled you. I am betrothed to another. Leave me, leave me, good youth, for awhile at least, and let us not speak of this again. I shall ever value your friendship, believe me.

[*PEDRILLO shakes his head to intimate that she misapprehends him, turns sadly away, and departs.*

Ah, how shall I forgive myself for this? Poor youth, how I pity him!

[FELIPPO comes forward.]

Felippo. Nay, beautiful Dolores, do not pity him. How could he presume to aspire to such loveliness? Methinks his madness is rightly reprov'd. Yet who could call it madness, either?

Dolores. Felippo, here! Stand back, sir. What means this insolence? You have had your answer.

Felippo. Pardon me, fair dame, but I have yet to learn my fate from your lips. Your answer, if you have sent one, has not yet reached me. Oh, surely I may hope that your sentence has been one of mercy.

Dolores. Ha! you have not yet received my letter! Well then, senhor, let me inform you, it was a reply such as your presumption merited, and your penetration must needs have foreseen.

Felippo. Say on, I am still in doubt.

Dolores. Still in doubt? You cannot mean it. What answer can a traitorous soldier and a ruined gamester expect to the suit he dares to offer to a Castilian maid?

Felippo. Oh, be not so harsh, sweet lady! Whatever my errors have been, they may yet be redeemed (*he falls on one knee*). Hear me, I entreat you! They speak falsely who would insinuate that I held treasonable correspondence with the French. It was a

malicious charge, made by a cunning enemy, and too hastily credited by my superiors. Nay, I can give you proofs!

Dolores. Senhor, I do not ask them. It is not to me that you have to answer whatsoever charges may be urged against you. Nor would it affect my resolve, though you could be proved blameless in all things.

Felippo. Nay, but hear me, I implore! You called me gamester—that too is false. One of the gross libels with which society ever assails those, to whom it has conceived a disfavour.

Dolores. What! you deny that you have been a gamester? Is that really your meaning, Senhor Felippo?

Felippo. Most surely, it is! (*Aside*) How on earth can she know? I am safe there, I expect.

Dolores (scornfully). Senhor, the denial is worthy of you. I know one, who not two days since beheld you risk your last coin at faro, and heard you in your despair proclaim yourself a ruined man.

Felippo (starting up). Malediction! He told you that himself?

Dolores. Not in words, but I can trust him as fully as though he had done so.

Felippo (aside). "Not in words"—and yet he told her! It must be the dumb boy Pedrillo. I remember now, I did notice him among the guests. He then

has helped to ruin me. I shall not forget that. But enough of this. I must try what threats will avail, since persuasion appears to be of but little service. (*Aloud*) Senhora, it is time we lay aside this tone. Remember we are alone among the mountains, and that I wear a dagger. If my fortunes are as desperate as you would represent, you will do well to avoid driving me to extremity.

Dolores. To extremity? Ruffian, I fear you not! Stand aside, and let me pass!

[*She attempts to push by him, but he seizes her by the arm.*]

Felippo. Proud damsel, your brave words will avail you nothing. Either you go hence as the affianced bride of Felippo Castanos, or—— (*he pauses*)

Dolores. Or what, base wretch? Again I tell you, I fear you not!

Felippo. Or you go not hence at all!

[*She disengages herself from his grasp, and draws a stiletto from her girdle. FELIPPO again endeavours to seize her. She defends herself, screaming aloud for help. In the struggle FELIPPO is wounded, and, maddened with rage, draws his dagger, and stabs her to the heart. With another scream she falls and expires.*]

Felippo. Malediction! I meant not that. Mad woman! She drew her fate upon herself! But I

must look to myself, or the consequences may be fatal. Is life wholly extinct? I must make sure of that.

[He bends over her, appearing to listen intently, at the same time wiping his dagger. Suddenly he starts up.]

I hear voices and footsteps coming this way. Her screams must have reached the ears of the vintagers. I must look to my own safety.

[As he is about to escape down the pass, PEDRILLO rushes in, with his dagger bare in his hand. He attempts to seize FELIPPO; who dashes him violently to the ground beside DOLORES, where he lies insensible.]

Confusion! the boy has recognized me, and his evidence will bring me to the scaffold! Must I stab him where he lies? Ha! his dagger is wet with Dolores's blood. I have it! I have it! *(He shouts aloud)* What! ho! neighbours, help! Here is murder done! Help me to secure the assassin!

[The peasants rush in, accompanied by FATHER HUGO. Some of them, by HUGO's order, raise PEDRILLO, who is still insensible, while others crowd round the corpse of DOLORES.]

First Peasant. What! Senhor Felippo! How has this befallen?

Peasant Woman. It is Donna Dolores, our noble Senhor's ward!

Father Hugo. Speak, senhor, and explain this foul deed.

Felippo. Reverend Father, I scarce know more than you do. I was on my way to Segovia to behold the bull-fight, when I heard voices loud in altercation. I hastened up—too late, alas! to save this noble lady from the foul murder which hath been wrought upon her; yet not too late to shed my blood in her defence! (*He holds up his arm.*) You see I bleed. The assassin, whoever he may be, had already effected his bloody deed, and struck at me with his dagger when I tried to seize him. It was not without a struggle that I struck him to the ground.

Father Hugo. Does any one know the murderer?

First Peasant. Why, it is Senhor Pedrillo, Senhor Alvaro's nephew! Poor youth! I can scarce believe he has done this deed.

Peasant Woman. No: for my part I always judged him to be deeply in love with her. I am sure he would not hurt a hair of her head.

Father Hugo. In love with her, say you? Then perhaps it was a lover's quarrel. See his dagger is bare in his hand, and it is deeply dyed with blood. But he will presently come to himself, and then we shall learn what defence he offers. Give him air, good friends: ye crowd too much round him.

[*As they open his doublet, to enable him to breathe*

more freely, a letter drops out. FATHER HUGO picks it up, and reads it apart.

First Peasant. He is coming to himself now, I think. I see a slight colour returning to his cheek.

Peasant Woman. Yes, he can stand by himself again. See he opens his eyes.

[PEDRILLO looks wildly round him, as though scarcely comprehending where he was. Presently his eye rests on the corpse of DOLORES. He utters a strange uncouth groan, and hides his face in his hands.

Second Peasant. Ah, he can't bear the sight. That looks to my mind as though he did it. Don't you think so, neighbours?

Peasant Woman. Nonsense! It is only that he is grieved to see the poor lady's body so foully outraged. I tell you, one of the curls on her head was dearer to him than another's whole body. I will never believe that he would raze the skin of her little finger.

Second Peasant. Ah, but, neighbour, you heard what the Reverend Father said respecting a lovers quarrel!

Peasant Woman. Quarrel quotha! this poor lad never quarrelled with a fly, much less with the lady Dolores. I tell you——

Father Hugo (folds up the letter, and comes forward). Hush! worthy friends. This is a black business, and must be fully inquired into. Four of you convey the corpse to the house of Senhor Alvaro.

The rest take care that the prisoner escape not. I will myself take charge of this letter and dagger. (To *Felippo*) Senhor, I presume you will be ready to give your evidence when the proper time shall arrive. Now move forward.

[*The peasants raise the body of DOLORES and lay it on their shoulders. PEDRILLO is led out between two peasants. FATHER HUGO and FELIPPO follow. The scene closes.*

SCENE THE THIRD.

A room in ALVARO'S house. ALVARO is discovered seated at a table, mournfully resting his head on his hand. Near him ALONZO, also seated.

Alonzo. Nay, senhor, I pray you to take comfort. It is a terrible calamity, doubtless. Yet remember she died as she had lived—a noble Castilian maiden, without spot of shame. Nor has an honourable trust ever been more worthily discharged than yours. I pray you to be comforted.

Alvaro. You are kind, Senhor Alonzo, and I thank you. In sooth, my distress is less for the dead than for the living. For my beloved Dolores, I doubt not her spirit is in heaven. But my poor nephew :—I fear grievous wrong will be done him. I scarce know how to help him.

Alonzo. Your nephew ! Surely no one can really believe him guilty of this deed !

Alvaro. My thanks once more, senhor. No ; no one who has known him, as I have done, from his childhood, who has marked the kindliness of his heart, that could never endure to hurt the meanest of God's creatures, would hold that such an accusation could by possibility be true. But, alas ! it is not by

his friends that his cause will be tried ; and there are those who are resolved to press this charge with the most implacable hostility.

Alonzo. What, poor Calderon, I suppose ? I own I am not surprised to hear that, after his angry language about Pedrillo this morning.

Alvaro. No, he has never liked my nephew. He fancied, what I fear there was some ground for, that Pedrillo was enamoured of poor Dolores. But he also fancied, what there was not the slightest ground for, that Dolores trifled with his attachment.

Alonzo. But Calderon is just, though somewhat jealous tempered and vindictive. If you can satisfy him that the charge against Pedrillo is groundless, he will be the last to press it.

Alvaro. Aye, if I *could* satisfy him ! But he is hard to satisfy, I trow. However, I have despatched a messenger to him, entreating him by our long friendship to see me at least, and talk this matter dispassionately over, before he undertakes the prosecution of my hapless nephew ; as it is his present purpose, if report speak truly, to do. I expect him here every minute. You will stay, will you not, and add your persuasion to mine ?

Alonzo. Surely ; and if Calderon persist, you shall not lack my humble efforts to procure your nephew's acquittal.

[*Enter* DIEGO.]

Diego. There is some one would speak with you senhora.

Alvaro. Aye, the Senhor Calderon, I suppose. Request him to walk in.

Diego (hesitating). No, it is not the Senhor Calderon. (*To Alonzo*) Would it please you to step into the outer chamber for a moment?

[ALONZO goes out.]

Alvaro. Why, what is the mystery? If it is not Calderon, who is it?

Diego. Pray, be calm, senhor. It is one whom you will be greatly surprised to see. It is a lady—the Senhora del Moreno.

Alvaro (starting up). What! are you mad, Diego—

[*Re-enter ALONZO, leading ANTONIA.* ALVARO stands motionless with surprise.

or, great Heavens! have I lost my senses?

Antonia (after a pause). I really think you must, guardian, to receive me in this strange fashion. And Alonzo, too, looks almost as much astonished. Do you think I am a ghost? Did you not expect me! Has my letter miscarried? Still silent? Don't you know your ward Antonia?

Alvaro. Antonia! So it is. Pray pardon me if at the moment— But how is this? The tidings cannot have reached you, surely? What am I saying! Of course they could not.

■ *Antonia.* What tidings? Where is Dolores?

[*ALVARO groans, and sinks back in his chair.*

■ *Alonzo.* Antonia, my beloved, we have a sad tale for your ear.

■ *Antonia.* Dolores is not ill, is she? Not in danger?

■ *Ah!* that look! Speak, I entreat you! It cannot be that— Oh! speak, speak!

■ *Alonzo.* Alas! Antonia!

■ *Antonia.* Ah! she is dead!

[*She bursts into an agony of tears.*

■ But how, when has this befallen her? She was well and in the best of spirits but yesterday, when she wrote to me. And where, too, is my old playmate Pedrillo? I trust no ill has happened to him, too?

■ *Alvaro.* Antonia, let me lead you within. Father Bernardo, your old friend and confessor, is in the oratory, and he will break the sad details more gently to your ear than we can. When you are more composed, we will talk with you again.

[*He conducts her from the stage, and presently returns.*

How like she is to her sainted sister! I declare the first sight of her, coming unexpectedly, as she did, almost turned me to stone. I deemed for a moment that it was Dolores herself risen from the dead.

■ *Alonzo.* True. Diego gave me a hint which partly prepared me, or I should have been equally startled

myself. Poor girl! It will be long ere she can be comforted.

[Enter DIEGO.

Diego. Senhor Calderon has arrived. Shall I bid him enter?

Alvaro. Do so.

[DIEGO ushers in CALDERON. *He is dressed entirely in black, and his manner is distant and abrupt.*

Calderon. Senhor Alvaro, I attend your summons; but I pray you to be brief, for I have much in hand. What would you with me?

Alvaro. I would implore your mercy—I should say your justice—in behalf of my unfortunate nephew.

Calderon. You implore my justice, do you say! Be assured you shall have it—aye, justice most impartial and complete!

Alvaro. I rejoice to hear you say so. Then you will aid me in making clear Pedrillo's innocence?

Calderon (*slowly*). Pedrillo's innocence?—Yes! his innocence—or his guilt, as the case may be.

Alvaro. His guilt? Nay, I can scarce believe that you account him guilty. Think of his blameless life, his tenderness of heart. Is it credible that he could perpetrate a deed of cruelty and horror, such as the most depraved must shudder even to contemplate! And to harm Dolores, too—

Calderon. Pardon, Senhor, but what avails this pleading?

Alvaro. Be patient, I pray you. My nephew would never harm created thing, but least of all Dolores, whom he loved above all things. Remember also how sad his lot in life has ever been. Cut off by his affliction from all that makes the happiness of mankind, how much has he been compelled to endure which others know nothing of! Would you heap more suffering on a head already crushed beneath such a weight of sorrow?—

Calderon. Senhor, let me pray you—

Alvaro. Hear me to the end, Calderon. I have nearly done. Remember once more, that charges which it would be easy for others to rebut, are in his instance almost impossible of refutation. The fatal accident that robbed him of his power of speech did not, it is true, wholly destroy his hearing; but it has so impaired it, that he can with difficulty comprehend what to others is plain and easy. What chance has he of explaining points of suspicion, or suggesting proofs of innocence; which would occur at once to other men accused of crime, but not to him? Will you put forth your weapons of strength—your eloquence as an orator, your skill as an advocate—against a babe like this?

[*ALVARO sinks back exhausted in his chair.*

Calderon. Senhor Alvaro, I have long known and honoured you. Believe me, were my duty less imperative : did the interests of justice call less loudly to me, I had gladly spared you—I may add mine own heart—this anguish. But it cannot be. Between this youth and me there yawns a grave, newly dug by murderous hands, and the spirit of my Dolores calls to me from it. This is no case where surmises and probabilities are balanced against each other. There is proof, strong damning proof—such as no court of justice on earth can ignore or question—

Alonzo. Proofs, say you, Calderon? Of what nature, I pray you? Call you the surmises which have been founded on looks, and sighs, and amorous gestures—call you these proofs that blackest murder has been done by him, by whom they were displayed?

Calderon. Surmises, Alonzo! think you I have nought but surmises to go on? I tell you there are proofs, which would weigh down a mountain of weak plausibilities. There is the certainty declared in her own handwriting, that he had dared to thrust his insolent suit on her; nay to threaten her with violence if she complied not; and there is her indignant reply, which drove him to execute his accursed threat. There is the testimony of those who found him on the very spot, his sleeve and drawn dagger deeply stained with her blood. Above all, there is the oath of the Senhor

Philippe de Castanos that he saw the blow struck, and tried, but too late, to arrest it.

Alonzo. The Senhor de Castanos is a man of the vilest character. Who would credit an assertion of his?

Calderon. Nay, scarcely that. He lost his commission in the army, no doubt; but he was convicted of no crime. He is a gamester, too, but so are many in Segovia whose word no one questions. Besides, it does not appear that Pedrillo, or Dolores either, were so much as known to him. What motive could he have for speaking falsely?

Alonzo. I cannot say. But he might have had one nevertheless.

Calderon. Doubtless. But that is a weak surmise; just such a one as Alvaro but now suggested as having influenced my resolve in this matter. Senhor, I grieve that I must reject your prayer, and I will not offend you longer with my presence. Plead, if you will, in court, all that you have advanced to me. It may move the Judge to mercy, though scarcely to injustice. Farewell! [*Exit.*]

Alvaro (after a pause). You have heard all that he has advanced: what think you now?

Alonzo. What I thought before—that Pedrillo is innocent!

Alvaro. Now an old man's blessing on you, my generous friend. I had almost feared that he had car-

ried you along with him. And if you think him innocent, why should not others? Yes, yes, all will go well yet. He will be triumphantly acquitted—I know he will!

Alonzo. Hem. I fear I cannot agree with you there. It is true I was not overcome by Calderon's arguments; we lawyers are not easily carried off our legs. But though convinced myself of Pedrillo's innocence, I am not prepared to say I can convince others of it. Calderon truly said that surmises and probabilities are of small weight against direct and positive testimony. I fully believe myself that Felippo did the deed; but my belief is nothing, unless I can bring some proof of it.

Alvaro. Who is this Felippo? I know little of him.

Alonzo. An officer suspected of treasonable dealings with the enemy, and cashiered on that account. I chance to know (what Calderon is ignorant of) that he was secretly Dolores' suitor; and I warned her not many days ago to beware of him. This letter found on Pedrillo may have been really addressed to him, and thrust by him into the youth's vest as he lay helpless on the ground. He may have used Pedrillo's dagger, instead of his own. All this is possible; and when the poor lad is sufficiently recovered to converse with us, we may elicit much from him. But—

[He pauses, as if in thought]

Alvaro. But what? Proceed, I beg you.

Alonzo. But, although we could make up the clearest of all possible cases to our own apprehension; that (I repeat) will avail nothing, unless we can make it clear to others also. And how are we to do that? I own, I almost despair of it. All the evidence—I refer not to the dagger, and the letter, and Pedrillo's presence on the spot, but the evidence of living witnesses,—all this is wholly on their side. The peasants, the priest, Felippo himself—all these are against us. If we had but one witness on our side—

[*The door suddenly opens, and ANTONIA enters.*

Alvaro (*starting back, and then with an effort recovering himself*). Merciful Heaven, how this strange likeness haunts me! I declare, for the moment I again believed that Dolores had risen from the dead!

Alonzo. Ha! a thought strikes me.

[*He stands absorbed in reflection.*

Antonia. I have been sitting by our beloved Dolores. They have stripped off the clothes stained with her blood, and wrapped her in virgin white.

Alonzo. Better and better; that too will serve.

Antonia. There is now no trace or token of violence. She seems as one lulled into a blessed slumber.

Alvaro. And so she is, my child. Or rather she hath been aroused from that slumber to a happier waking. Senhor Alonzo—

Alonzo (starting out of his reverie). Yes, it will do, it will do ! Victoria ! it will do !

Alvaro (surprised). What will do, senhor ?

Alonzo. I crave your pardon. Sweet Antonia, you will do all in your power, will you not, to save your old playmate and kinsman from an unjust sentence ?

Antonia. I will do all that may be done in honour.

Alonzo. Good. And you, senhor, command, I pray you, that the garments worn by poor Dolores be carefully preserved, and no mention made of Antonia's presence in Segovia.

Alvaro. For what purpose, senhor ?

Alonzo. I will explain that anon.

(Exeunt.)

SCENE THE FOURTH.

A Court of Justice. On one side the JUDGES, with CALDERON and ALONZO seated before them. At the other, PEDRILLO, in irons, and guarded. In the centre (back) the witness-box. In the corner of the stage, near PEDRILLO, stand ALVARO, FELIPPO, FATHER HUGO, and 1ST PEASANT. ANTONIA, wrapped in a long cloak and hood, stands near ALVARO. In the back-ground, spectators, guards, &c.

The Senior Judge. Pedrillo Mendez, you stand before us arraigned upon a charge, one of the heaviest in the law's catalogue of crime. You are accused of having, with premeditated malice, slain a noble lady, Dolores del Moreno. I learn that an unhappy accident many years ago deprived you of your power of speech, and that you cannot plead your innocence or your guilt after the ordinary fashion of prisoners at the bar of justice. You must therefore signify, in the manner you ordinarily employ, to the Court, whether you are guilty or not guilty of this charge.

[PEDRILLO raises his hands and eyes to heaven with a passionate gesture, and then expands them before the Judges.

The Senior Judge. The prisoner declares his inno-

cence. Let the proceedings commence. Who is the counsel for the prosecution ?

Calderon (rising). That is my office. Grave and Reverend Sir,—It is with a saddened heart that I rise to its performance. The prisoner at the bar is the near relative of one of my best and earliest friends. The lady thus cruelly done to death was one dearer to me still. But I must lay aside all private feeling in the interests of justice, and deal with the matter calmly and impartially. It had long been seen that the prisoner was deeply enamoured of the Senhora Dolores, though she returned not his affection. On the morning of the murder, it has been ascertained that he wrote her a letter full of passionate entreaties to hearken to his suit, as well as of threats of vengeance if she should refuse. She replied in terms of just indignation and defiance. That reply was found in the prisoner's vest, when he was arrested after the deed. It has also been clearly proved that he was aware that the unhappy lady had walked forth alone to visit the vineyard in the mountains. Also, that it was only that morning that he had been informed, how the senhora was affianced to another. Burning with jealousy and hate, he rushed forth, nor was he again seen until the fatal deed had been accomplished. Then some peasants at work in a vineyard nigh at hand, and a Holy Friar of the Carmelite order, who was

passing by, heard her shrieks, and afterwards cries for help, and hastened to the spot. They found her already dead—stabbed to the heart—and Pedrillo lying by her side, with a dagger in his hand, deeply dyed with her blood. The cries, they found, proceeded from a gentleman of Segovia, the Senhor Felippo de Castanos, who chanced to be travelling that way, and saw the blow struck, though unhappily not in time to prevent the assassination. These points I shall endeavour to establish by the evidence of trustworthy witnesses. Should I do so, it needs not to say there cannot remain the slightest doubt of the prisoner's guilt. Officer, summon the first witness, Alvaro Mendez.

The Crier. Appear before this Court, Alvaro Mendez!

[ALVARO steps into the witness-box.

Calderon. Alvaro Mendez, you were the guardian of the murdered lady, Dolores del Moreno, were you not?

Alvaro. I was.

Calderon. And the prisoner at the bar is your nephew?

Alvaro. Yes.

Calderon. Had you ever reason to suppose that your nephew was enamoured of the Lady Dolores?

Alvaro. He was fond of her.

Calderon. Fond of her? in what way? As a brother affects a sister, or a lover his mistress?

Alvaro. I fear the latter.

Calderon. On what do you ground your opinion? Did you ever see him make love to her, seize and kiss her hand, fall on his knee before her, and the like?

Alvaro (*reluctantly*). I did—once.

Calderon. When was that?

Alvaro (*still more unwillingly*). On the morning of the murder.

Calderon. Did you see anything else pass on that occasion?

[*ALVARO hesitates.*]

Calderon. Speak, senhor.

[*ALVARO is still silent.*]

The Senior Judge. Senhor Alvaro, you must answer.

Alvaro. I saw her deliver a letter into his hand.

Calderon. Ha! a letter—the letter!—What followed then?

Alvaro. He rose and hurried from the room.

Alonzo. Did the Senhora Dolores appear to be displeased with your nephew when she delivered him the letter?

Alvaro. No; it did not strike me so.

Alonzo. Did she express to you any indignation, or complaint of his conduct?

Alvaro. She did not.

Alonzo. What is your nephew's character and disposition? Is he kindly of heart, or the reverse?

Alvaro. The kindest-hearted of God's creatures. He never harmed living thing, from his cradle to this hour.

Calderon. Is he not also hasty and passionate?

Alvaro (in a different tone). I have known him so, sometimes.

Calderon. Senhor, that will suffice. Officer, call Manuel Roxa.

The Crier. Appear before this Court, Manuel Roxa!

[FIRST PEASANT *steps into the witness-box.*

Calderon. Manuel Roxa, relate what you know of this deed.

First Peasant. Most Worshipful Sir, I was at work with my mates in the vineyard last Tuesday. About half-an-hour after our return from mass we heard a shriek. I judge it was about a quarter of a mile off. Then came a second like it. Says I to my neighbour, Sancho, "There's some one hurting a woman; let us go and see about it." Well, about half-a-dozen of us ran off, and on our way we came up with the Reverend Father there, who had also heard the screaming. Just at this moment we heard a man's voice close by calling for help. Well, we came to the spot, and there was the lady—the saints preserve us!—lying on her back, with a great gash in her bosom, and a short dagger in her hand.

Calderon. Was she dead?

First Peasant. I judge she was, for I never saw her stir.

Calderon. Well, what else saw you?

First Peasant. I saw the prisoner there lying on the ground beside her. He had a dagger in his hand, which, as well as his sleeve, was covered with the lady's blood.

Calderon. Did you see the Senhor de Castanos?

First Peasant. Yes, he was standing close by trying to staunch the blood from a wound in his arm. It was he who was crying for help, to secure, as he told us, the prisoner, who had done the deed.

Alonzo. Was the prisoner lying *near* the body, or was he actually in contact with it?

First Peasant. He was lying with his arm resting on her. His sleeve and the weapon were in a pool of blood.

Alonzo. Then the stains might have been contracted after the prisoner's fall to the ground.

First Peasant. Why, yes, they might, to be sure. But then from what Senhor Felippo said—

Alonzo. Senhor Felippo will tell his own tale. *(To Calderon)* You had better call your next witness.

Calderon. True. Summon Father Hugo of the convent of Our Lady of the Sea.

Crier. Father Hugo, appear before this court!

[FATHER HUGO enters the box.

Calderon. Holy Father, will you be pleased to declare what you saw and heard on Tuesday last?

Father Hugo. The last witness has correctly stated all that passed, previously to the discovery of the corpse. At my command they raised the prisoner from the ground, and loosed his doublet to give him air. As they did so, this letter fell from his vest. I opened and read it; after which I immediately sealed it up again. Here it is.

[*He produces a letter, which he hands to the judges.*

The Senior of them breaks the seal, and reads.

"I know not whether your presumption in addressing me, or your insolent persistence after repeated rebuffs, most merit reproof. You must have surely known that no lady could hearken to a suit from such as you. If I have kept the matter secret from my guardian, that has only been because I would not cause him trouble. But should you still persevere, be assured I will demand his aid. For your threats of vengeance, I scorn them, even as I scorn their author. Dolores." Do you swear, Reverend Father, that you saw this letter fall from the bosom of the prisoner, when his vest was opened?

Father Hugo. I do.

Calderon. And the document has never left your hands from that time till now?

Father Hugo. Never for a moment.

Alonzo. Is there any superscription or address?

Father Hugo. None.

Alonzo. Was it enclosed in any envelope?

Father Hugo. No. It was as you see it now.

Alonzo. Then there is no evidence in the letter that it was addressed to the prisoner?

Father Hugo. None that I know of, except that it was found on him—unless by the bye the sentence “you must surely have known that no lady could hearken to a suit from such as you” may be thought to contain a reference to his infirmity of speech.

Calderon. Most truly observed, Holy Father; we thank you. Now let the Senhor de Castanos be called.

Crier. Senhor Felippo de Castanos, appear before this Court!

[*FELIPPO ascends the box.*]

Calderon. Senhor, we wait to hear your evidence.

Felippo. On Tuesday last, about the hour of noon, I was on my way to Segovia, when I heard voices at a little distance loud in altercation. I hurried up, and just as I reached the spot I saw a stripling youth—the prisoner yonder—raise his arm, and strike a lady a deadly blow with his dagger. I rushed forward, and tried to seize his hand. He turned, and struck at

me, wounding me on the arm. But I succeeded, after a sharp struggle, in dashing him to the ground. Finding myself, however, growing weak, and fearing lest he should regain his senses, I shouted for help to secure the assassin. Then Father Hugo and the peasants came up, who have truly related what followed.

Calderon. You say you saw the blow struck? Did the Senhora appear to be defending herself?

Felippo. She had a short weapon in her hand; but I did not see her use it.

Calderon. Did the lady shriek more than once?

Felippo. She shrieked twice. Once before I came in sight, and once when she felt the stab.

Alonzo. Senhor, is the pass where this deed was done, the nearest route from your house to Segovia?

Felippo. It is not; but I often traverse it notwithstanding. Its beauty has a great charm for me, especially during the vintage season.

Alonzo. What is your present occupation or profession?

Felippo. I have none. I left the army a twelve-month ago.

Alonzo. Wherefore did you leave it?

Felippo. A misapprehension arose respecting some letters, and I deemed it incompatible with my honour to hold my commission longer.

Alonzo. Were you not dismissed with ignominy!

Calderon. That question cannot lawfully be asked.

Felippo. It matters not. I am prepared to swear I was not.

Alonzo (aside). Liar! but, alas! I have no witness
(*Aloud*) Senhor, were you not the suitor of this unhappy lady?

Felippo (affecting surprise). Of Donna Dolores! Certainly not. Her person was scarcely known to me.

Alonzo. Will you swear that you did not address a letter to her, demanding an interview, and threatening her if she refused?

Felippo. Most certainly I will. I know not to what purpose these questions are put.

Alonzo. Nor I, if you so answer them. I question you no further. You may retire.

[*FELIPPO leaves the box. ALONZO resumes his seat.*
Calderon. This is the last witness.

I have no more to urge—each circumstance
Of this vile deed, consists with one conclusion,
The prisoner's guilt—*his* only. Proofs so strong
Endure no comment, need no inference.
These would but darken what is clear as day,
Wherefore I leave it to your wise award (*he sits down*).

Alonzo (rising). Most reverend Senhors, I implore
your grace.

Mine is no ordinary task this day!

The life or death are hanging on my lips
Of one most helpless and most deeply wronged.
Strange chances—which the broken glass of life,
With all its wild distortions, rarely shows—
Have made his innocence seem guilt—yet pause,
Pause ere you judge, and hear his simple tale!

'Tis said he loved Dolores—true, he loved her—
But only as the reverent devotee
Loves the pure saint, to whom his vows are poured,
With which no taint of earthly passion blends.

'Tis said the tale of her betrothal stirred
His jealous anger—true again, it stirred him,
But not to jealousy. He but deplored
Her union with a man he could not love.

'Tis urged that in his vest a note was found
After the deed, wherein Dolores blamed
His daring suit, and his revenge defied—
True, once again, the letter was so found,
Yet was not his. Upon that fatal morn
Dolores gave into his charge the missive
With secrecy and speed to be conveyed
To Don Felippo, who had sought her love.
It bore no superscription, for she brooked not
It should be known that aught had passed between
them.

The prisoner went upon his quest, he tracked
Felippo to the mountains, and would there

Have warned her of her peril—but in error
She sent him from her presence ; till her shrieks
Drew him, with weapon bared, to her defence.
He found the deed that instant done—beside
His victim stood the assassin ; who thereon
Dreading his witness, with infernal craft
Turned upon him the charge. With stronger hand
He struck the stripling prostrate to the earth ;
Staining his sleeve and dagger with her gore,
Then called for help, and bade them seize the murderer.

Such is the prisoner's tale. Ye heard it said,
"That every circumstance of this vile deed
Consisted with his guilt, and his alone."
I ask what circumstance, what likelihood
Consists not with his *innocence* ? in sooth
It is his word 'gainst that of Don Felippo.
Believe the one, you needs condemn the other,
Which then demands your faith?—the poor dumb
laid,

Guileless as childhood, harmless as the dove,
Who loved this murdered maiden with a love
Pure as intense—or yon dark man of crime,
The ruined gamester, the dishonoured soldier—

Calderon. My lords, I claim protection for my
witness !

Alonzo, on the prisoner's part, may plead
Whatever wild and monstrous tale he deems

May prop his desperate cause, but not assail,
Without the semblance of a proof—

The Senior Judge (interrupting). 'Tis well.

We had reprov'd him, though you had not spoken.
Senhor, this must not be ; and I must warn you,
Howe'er unwillingly, your whole defence
Is weak and baseless, as yourself must know !
You say this youth did not affect Dolores—
Alvaro, though most zealous for his kinsman,
Allows the contrary. You say the letter
Found on him was designed for Don Felippo—
Of that you urge no proof, however slight.
Nor do the contents of that letter point
In anywise to him, but rather suit
The prisoner's self. You say that Don Felippo
In secret woo'd Dolores—here again
You can allege no evidence. Once more,
The prisoner's blade was bared and drenched with
blood,
That of Felippo sheathed and free from stain.
Your story claims t' explain the former fact,
But leaves the last untouched.

We have to weigh
Assertion unsupported, and at war
With every likelihood and every fact,
'Gainst unrefuted evidence. 'Tis true
Could you produce some witness—

Alonzo.

Reverend sirs,

I crave your pardon, but I have not ended :
And pray you hear me now. I *will* produce
A witness—one whose eye beheld the deed,
And can declare the murderer.

Felippo (rushing forward).

Ha ! a witness !

That cannot be, for none were present there
Except the prisoner and myself—

*Alonzo (signals to ANTONIA, who moves unperceived
through the Court to the witness-box. He
then resumes in a solemn tone).*

It is most true !

You three alone were there—the Murdered Maid,
The Accuser, and the Accused. Your tale and his
Are but direct denials, each of each.

The *third* must judge between ye, only She—
Call into Court DOLORES DEL MORENO !

[A general murmur of astonishment in the Court.

FELIPPO'S agitation becomes evident.

The Senior Judge (sternly).

This is but folly—think you time, and place,
And our grave presence, brook a jest like this ?

Alonzo. I jest not. Ye have heard, in heathen times,
How, when dark deeds were done, inscrutable
To human eye, the spirits of the slain
Were called by potent Magians from their tombs
To solve the riddle. How in later times,
When first the Church was planted in this earth,

For the more confirmation of man's faith,
Saints and Apostles raised the shrouded dead.
For me—I am no sorcerer, and the days
Of open miracle have passed; yet still
Justice divine sits ruler of both worlds—
The world of Spirits, and the world of men—
Wherefore it is my faith—that in this strait,
Sooner than Murder shall have license given
To trample Innocence, the grave will yawn,
And give Dolores back to show the truth.
Thus then I claim my right. The laws of Spain
Do clearly charter:—"Each and every witness
I summon must be cited into Court.
And should this be withheld, whatever sentence
Thereon shall be pronounced, is null and void."

*[The JUDGES confer together. Murmurs of amazement
in the Court. FELIPPO'S agitation becomes more
and more apparent. After a considerable interval
the JUDGES resume their places.]*

The Senior Judge. Senhor, the law is worded as you
say.

And though we cannot deem it was designed
To warrant such a wild demand as yours—
The which we count irreverent and profane—
Yet must we grant it, if you still insist.

Alonzo. I do demand it.

The Senior Judge (to the Crier). Make the proclamation!

Felippo (again rushing forward). No, no, my lord
do not permit this madness !

Who knows what treacherous snare, what devils
treason,

May lurk beneath this all-unheard-of claim !

Forbid it, I implore ye !

The Senior Judge.

Man, be silent !

Our judgment has been given. (*To Crier*) Proceed !

Crier.

Appear

Before this Court, Dolores del Moreno !

[*A scream of terror resounds through the Court, a*

ANTONIA, dressed in the robes of the murderer

DOLORES, rises in the witness-box.

Felippo (falling on his knees). Oh horror ! horror !

'tis Dolores' self !

The gaping wound, the blood-bedabbled vest !

'Twas thus she looked, the moment that my dagger

Transfixed her heart——

Alonzo.

Ha ! marked you that, my lords !

Felippo. Take me away to prison and to death.

I do confess my deed—I, only I,

Wrought this dark murder, and yon prisoner there

Is guiltless as an infant ! Bear me hence

Where those dread eyes shall look on me no more !

(*The curtain falls.*)

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The Witness. p.—373.



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